wild eye

Issue 08 JULY 2026

Coral Reefs in Focus with Alex Mustard

Christine Kenyon Masters the Milky Way

Karen Hutton Gets Creative with FUJIFILM



wild eye

A LENS ON THE UNTAMED WORLD

A LENS ON THE UNTAMED WORLD

Contents

Features



30 CORAL REEFS
Cities of life
Words and Images by Dr. Alex Mustard



60 CAPTURING STARS
Memories written in light
Words and Images by Christine Kenyon



82 THE VOICE OF ZION
Chasing the magic
Words and Images by Karen Hutton

Departments



8 FULL VIEW
Beneath the surface
Words and Image by Edwin Giesbers



10 INNOVATIONS
Revealing the extraordinary
Words and Images by Filipp Kabanyayev



20 FIELD NOTES
Climbing for cormorants
Words and Images By Morgan Heim

6 BEHIND THE COVER

7 PUBLISHER'S MESSAGE

110 FULL IMPACT

112 WILD LANDS

122 PARTING SHOT

FUJIFILM

GFX
CHALLENGE
GRANT PROGRAM
2026





Fund Your Creative Vision

Are you ready to take your image making to the next level? The GFX Challenge Grant Program is your opportunity to bring ambitious projects to life and celebrate nature through extraordinary photography and video.

Successful applicants will receive a $10,000 Global Grant Award or $5,000 Regional Grant Award, alongside access to FUJIFILM GFX System to create their project, technical and creative insight, and a place in an international showcase.

See entry requirements today, prepare your application carefully, then submit it before the deadline of August 17, 2026. Your next great masterpiece starts here.

Scan code
for entry
information

Photo © 2023 Katie Orlinsky | FUJIFILM GFX100S mirrorless digital camera with FUJINON GF32-64mmF4 R LM WR, 1/7000 sec at F9, ISO 640.
FUJIFILM is a trademark of FUJIFILM Corporation and its affiliates. © 2026 FUJIFILM North America Corporation and its affiliates. All rights reserved.

wild eye
ISSUE 08 JULY 2026

PUBLISHER & CONTENT DIRECTOR
Jason Bradley

EDITOR IN CHIEF
Miriam Stein Battles

DESIGN DIRECTOR
Kevin Herman

DIRECTOR OF TECHNOLOGY
Brittany Ansay

MARKETING DIRECTOR
Selina Sahba

CONTACT
Advertise: sales@wildeyemagazine.com
Editorial Inquiries: editor@wildeyemagazine.com
Support: support@wildeyemagazine.com

SUBSCRIBE
www.wildeyemagazine.com

©2026 Wild Eye Magazine. All rights reserved. Content may not be reproduced or copied in any form, in part or in whole, without explicit, written permission. The views and opinions presented here are those of their respective authors and may not reflect the views of Wild Eye Magazine or its staff.



BEHIND THE COVER
Words and Image by Alex Mustard

Batangas Marine Protected Area, Philippines
Incredible biodiversity characterizes coral reefs and is critically at stake as reefs struggle in a warming ocean. I combined light from a snooted strobe to freeze the fish and used intentional camera movement to create textures from the polyps to show this ghost goby making its home on a sea pen.

www.wildeyemagazine.com

Publisher's Message



A MATTER OF FLUENCY

Our cameras focus faster. Editing tools become more powerful. Artificial intelligence can now make selections, analyze images, and automate tasks that once required significant time and experience.

As someone who has spent most of my life behind a camera, I find these advances exciting. Better tools have always expanded what photographers can create, but as I looked through the stories in this issue, I kept thinking about what hasn't changed and what I'm optimistic never will.

The final image is only what we see. What we don't see are the years of decisions, experiments, failures, and refinements that made that image possible.

We don't see the thousands of hours Alex Mustard has spent underwater learning how reefs function, how animals behave, and how to reveal the complexity of an ecosystem most of us rarely experience.

We don't see the nights Christine Kenyon spent waiting for clear skies, learning the movement of stars, and developing the skills needed to capture moments written in light.

We don't see the persistence behind Morgan Heim's story, climbing bridges and finding creative ways to document the lives of cormorants, a species many people overlook.

And we don't see the years spent developing a creative voice, whether it's Karen Hutton interpreting the landscapes of Zion or Filipp Kabanyayev experimenting with light until something as simple as a leaf becomes something entirely new. That's fluency. It's the invisible work behind the visible result.

Technology can help us move faster. It can remove barriers. It can give more people access to creative possibilities. But it cannot replace curiosity, patience, experience, or intention. Together, those are the foundation of fluency. And maybe that matters now more than ever.

In a world increasingly focused on making things easier, the photographers in this issue remind us that there's no shortcut around time spent.

Fluency will continue shaping what is meaningful. And I believe that's what we celebrate here in Issue 8.

JASON BRADLEY, PUBLISHER AND CONTENT DIRECTOR



Beneath the Surface

WORDS AND IMAGE BY EDWIN GIESBERS

I MADE THIS IMAGE while on assignment documenting threatened amphibians. Salamander species across Europe were collapsing due to an invasive fungus. In the Netherlands, from March through June, several salamander species, some of which are newts, enter the water to reproduce.

Exploring a pond, I noticed this Southern crested newt paused for a moment in the cold water. The pond was deep enough for me to hold my camera below the salamander. I use this point-and-shoot method frequently when photographing amphibians in the water with much trial and error.

For photographing salamanders underwater, I achieve better results with a smaller compact camera than with a larger SLR. The small size allows me to work in underwater habitats without disturbing the subject or silty freshwater floors.

---

*See more of **Edwin Giesbers**' work at www.edwingiesbers.com.*



Revealing the Extraordinary

Creating Magic with Light Painting

WORDS AND IMAGES BY FILIPP KABANYAYEV

THERE'S A KIND OF EXCITEMENT CHILDREN feel when they discover something ordinary for the first time, a fascination so complete that even the smallest object seems alive with possibility. I still feel that way when I find an interesting leaf.

Sometimes it happens on a hike. Sometimes in a parking lot or while walking my dogs. I pick up a leaf and hold it toward the sky, watching sunlight move through it. Tiny veins branch like rivers. Cellular patterns begin to glow. Curves resemble wings or ocean creatures. Textures resemble landscapes seen from above. And suddenly the leaf no longer seems separate from me. It feels alive in the same way I'm alive.

Photography became my way of chasing that feeling, but for a long time, I couldn't capture it. My images showed what leaves looked like, not what they felt like.

Everything changed when I watched a documentary about an underwater photographer shooting shipwrecks in deep, murky water. The visibility was too poor for any conventional light source to illuminate an entire vessel, so he fixed his camera to the ocean floor, opened the shutter on a long exposure, and swam slowly around the wreck with a single light source, illuminating it piece by piece. The camera captured all of it in a single continuous long-exposure image. I remember watching that and thinking, "I can do this with a leaf."

Into the Dark

My first studio was a 6x6-foot closet. I brought home leaves from my hikes, laid them on a small glass table, killed the lights, and started experimenting. The setup was simple: a black cloth background, a glass table, a colorful flashlight, and my camera set to bulb mode.

At first, I placed the leaves flat on the glass, but eventually I began balancing them upright — finding the natural point at which each leaf could stand on its own. Leaves that won't balance don't get used. That search for balance became part of the creative process itself.

The reflection wasn't intentional at first. I used a glass table simply to make the leaves feel suspended in darkness without visible supports, but I ended up loving the natural reflections it created.

Although I started with leaves, I now shoot flowers as well. I place a single flower in a black vase against the black cloth and work the same way — starting in darkness and building color with the flashlight, one pass at a time. Flowers are harder as the shapes are more complex, and unlike leaves, they don't last. But that difficulty makes the results more rewarding.

P10-11: Originally white, these lilies were illuminated with green light at their centers and then blue light along the outer petals, creating the illusion of a lantern-like glow from within.

→ Originally white, this peony was painted with blue light, applied from multiple angles around the flower, creating the appearance of a cresting ocean wave.





The Technique
I use a Panasonic Lumix S5, with either a macro lens or a 24-70mm lens, depending on the subject and the composition I'm after. Exposure times range from five seconds to several minutes. I work almost entirely in bulb mode, keeping the shutter open for as long as the image needs.

Before I take a single real frame, I take anywhere from five to 20 test shots, adjusting the intensity and angle of light until I understand how that leaf or flower is responding to the light. Every subject is different. The translucency and density of the material, the shape of the subject, the texture and color of the surface — all of it changes how light behaves.

My primary light source is the RGB Critter by Ants on the Melon, which I can control entirely from my phone during the exposure. It gives me access to 16 million colors, adjustable brightness, and the ability to create and recall custom color palettes.

A single image might involve 20 to 30 separate passes of the flashlight. Sometimes I make one long, slow sweep around the subject. Other times, I change colors mid-exposure and shift direction entirely — building the image in layers the way a painter would. Essentially, I'm painting the leaf with light in complete darkness, stroke by stroke, with no ability to see the final image until the shutter closes.

Post-processing is minimal. I adjust exposure and highlights, refine colors slightly, and sharpen. The most time-consuming edit, surprisingly, is dust removal — on glass, under directed light, every particle becomes visible. But I try not to touch the image itself. What you see in the final photograph is almost exactly what I saw on the camera preview when I opened the shutter for the last time.

What the Darkness Reveals
The results always blow me away. Change the light, and a leaf becomes a butterfly. A flower becomes a nebula. The ordinary reveals itself as cosmic. That is what I was always trying to photograph. The feeling that everything is connected, and all it takes to see that connection is a different perspective.

---

*To see more of **Filipp Kabanyayev**'s work, visit www.filippkabanyayev.com.*

P14: This parrot tulip was illuminated from multiple angles with different colors to emphasize the dramatic curves and textures of its petals.

P15: Placed on glass to create a reflection, this maple leaf was illuminated with complementary colors to emphasize its veins, ridges, and sculptural form.

→ Warm orange light illuminates this zinnia's center, while cool blue light defines its outer petals, highlighting its radial symmetry and geometric form.

P18: The outer petals of this white dahlia were damaged by insects. Bright red light highlights the intact center, while darker colors emphasize the fading edges.

P19: Placed on glass to create a reflection, this dry leaf was illuminated with contrasting colors chosen through experimentation to emphasize its texture and form.







Climbing For Cormorants

Scaling Heights to Photograph Colony Life

WORDS AND IMAGES BY MORGAN HEIM

When people ask what animals I like to photograph most, I answer that my favorite things to photograph are questions. Wildlife that represents surprising relationships with nature always piques my curiosity. So, it's fitting that a particularly problematic bird that I could see from my bedroom window would become an obsession — the cormorant.



P20-21: Astoria, Oregon Cormie, an ambassador double-crested cormorant that lives at the Wildlife Center of the North Coast, sports the double white crests from which her species gets its name. White crests are unique to the subspecies of double-crested cormorants that live in the Pacific Northwest and only appear during the breeding season. Double-crested cormorants in other regions of North America have black crests.

→ **Astoria, Oregon** Through record heat domes, storms, and turf wars, the camera reveals how one cormorant family persists in raising its young. In this instance, in June 2022, temperatures soared into the 90s for almost a week. The images revealed the cormorants' remarkable fidelity, as parents tirelessly shielded their young from the heat.

The Background
Astoria, Oregon, was once home to one of the largest nesting colonies of double-crested cormorants on Earth, roughly 15,000 breeding pairs that nested on East Sand Island, a few miles from town, each spring and summer. In 2015, the Army Corps of Engineers initiated a culling campaign to reduce cormorants from 15,000 breeding pairs to 5,000. The drop, combined with increased predation, caused the colony to collapse. The remaining cormorants fled the island and took up residence in a place that felt safe, the local Astoria-Megler Bridge. It felt safe because the cormorants were protected from humans by the inaccessibility of the bridge.

The Challenge
I hoped that by investigating the life of cormorants and what it means to exist alongside them, humans could move beyond an adversarial relationship and recognize what makes this species interesting and worth protecting. That meant studying and documenting the day-to-day lives of the cormorants.



Astoria, Oregon A cormorant offers his mate a gift, which she only took after several insistent attempts. The female then threw the feather to the ground and took flight. Shortly thereafter, the male placed the feather among the others on the nest, but then he, too, flew the coop. “I think we just witnessed a cormorant divorce,” said one member of the research team. A neighboring couple then ripped the nest apart.



↑ Astoria, Oregon Researchers from Oregon State University and Real Time Research conduct surveys on the cormorant colony living on the bridge. In 2020, they embarked on a study that entails searching the colonies for PIT tags from salmon that have been released from hatcheries. The pit tags, consumed by cormorants when they eat the fish, could help managers better understand whether abatement strategies, such as fish ladders at dams, have been successful.

→ Astoria, Oregon Upon first glance, this photo looks basic, but the process of climbing a guano- and algae-encrusted ladder on the Astoria-Megler Bridge, camera trap and solar panels strapped to my back, was dangerous. To get on the ladder, I had to step from a boat in a narrow gap between the crib and the concrete base of the bridge. I used a climbing harness and rope as safety measures, as a slip would mean almost certain death.





Astoria, Oregon While one camera failed, the other held up through heat waves and storms, capturing images of a single family from egg-laying to fledge. Every five minutes, the camera recorded an image of this nest from sunrise to sunset, producing more than 15,000 images over two months.

So, how do you get close to a sensitive seabird colony that nests on an expansive bridge, in an area known for its unpredictable storms? The answer seemed clear: Time-lapse and a whole lot of luck.

I needed to place time-lapse cameras within the colony and leave them up for a couple of months. I hoped the images would provide a systematic glimpse into the life and nesting success of a colony. The approach could be useful for science, and hopefully, I'd get a few good photos. One camera would take a broad overview of the colony, and the other would focus on a single family.

The Planning

I wanted to place two cameras on the bridge to capture the day-to-day lives of these birds. However, you can't just wander up to a bridge and climb it. Gaining permissions and planning the approach would be critical.

Luckily, I had formed friendships with scientists from Oregon State University and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife during cormorant surveys I joined. I approached the Oregon Department of Transportation, the agency in charge of the bridge, and asked them if I could climb it to place a couple of time-lapse cameras. The response was utter befuddlement as no one had ever asked such a question before. But they didn't say no. Thus began months of permitting, letters of partnership, submission of detailed plans, and coordinating approvals with government agencies.

As the final window for opportunity neared, I got the call. "You got the permit," said my contact at the Department of Transportation. "I can't believe it," I said. "Me neither," he replied.

The Execution

That weekend, the weather was perfect, with water calm enough to navigate the narrow slip between the bumper and the bridge. I stepped from the boat onto a guano-encrusted ladder and began the long climb, a backpack with time-lapse cameras and solar panels strapped to my back. I had 30 minutes to set up both cameras.

Atop the crib was a magical sight. On a latticework of wood, hundreds of cormorants balanced on nests. They were surprisingly calm, emitting a gentle symphony of guttural coos. Only the adults next to me moved as I appeared over the edge. There was no time to get fussy about composition. I had to trust that I knew what I was doing and get out of there. I set the two viewpoints on my cameras and signaled for the boat to pick me up.

Within 24 hours, my first camera failed, and then the second became covered in guano. It's a helpless thing to watch a project you tried to plan so carefully fail with no means to fix it. But this is where I'll always be grateful to live in a place famed for its rain. Storms swept through, washing off enough guano to make the nest visible. The camera that didn't fail took a picture every five minutes from sunrise to sunset, 15,000 images over the course of two months.

The Results

The pictures revealed one family as they endeavored to raise their young. They proved tireless, faithful, and self-sacrificing parents. Standing with wings outstretched to shade their young for long stretches during a heat wave and diligently fishing to bring food to their chicks. I cheered when I saw that all three of their young grew fluffy, then feathered. The guano even became a storytelling feature of the images.

These images have become part of a larger story about the cormorants under the bridge. I have followed hatchery workers, bridge engineers, and the relationship of one very special ambassador cormorant named Cormie to share the bigger story of these amazing, tenacious, troublesome, and brilliant native birds.

Today, managers want to get cormorants to go back to East Sand Island. While the bridge is good for the birds, the birds aren't good for the bridge.

Whatever happens, I don't know if we'll learn our lesson, but I'm pretty sure the cormorants won this battle.

---

*See more of **Morgan Heim**'s work at www.morganheim.com.*



Coral Reefs

Cities of Life

WORDS AND IMAGES
BY DR. ALEX MUSTARD



approach the seafan for a closer look, lured in by its outrageous golden-orange hue. The gaps between the glowing branches are so packed with delicate white, eight-armed polyps that I struggle to comprehend where they can all attach. A tiny, translucent ghost goby darts down one of the branches, then freezes, attempting to resume its hidden life. It's tiny, like the tip of a cotton bud, but on its side is a parasitic copepod with two spirals of eggs winding out of its carapace.

Nearby, I spot a porcelain crab clinging to one of the branches, fanning out its jointed appendages to filter food from the flow of the ocean, a couple more ghost gobies, and then the eyes of a glass shrimp as it scuttles through the polyps. It's a tiny world of animals, vertebrates, and invertebrates, living out their lives in an area smaller than a postcard. A microcosm of symbioses that define coral reefs and allow them to support so many species in a small space.

I back away and more of the reef fills my view. A group of purple anthias parade by — sponges, sea squirts, hydroids, soft corals, and hard corals all competing for space on every surface. A vermillion grouper dotted in sky blue is lurking below an overhang, and streams of schooling blue and yellow fusiliers flow above. This is animal life expressed in movement, color, abundance, and diversity unrivaled on Earth.

P30-31: Lembeh Strait, Sulawesi, Indonesia Ghost gobies make their home, almost unnoticed, on the branches of a vibrant seafan. Look closer and spot a small crab and a copepod parasite in a goby.

← Vatu-i-Ra Conservation Park, Fiji At first glance, a coral reef is a blizzard of color and movement. Scalefin anthias and magenta slender anthias stream in front of green coral.

The most recent global study says coral reefs provide goods and services worth roughly $2.7 trillion per year.

More Than Rainforests

Many people say that coral reefs are the "rainforests of the sea," but I've always felt that rather undersells them. Whenever I've visited rainforests, I've seen a lot of green, but found animal life takes an expert eye to glimpse. Coral reefs bombard your senses with an onslaught of animal variety and abundance.

All living animals are classified into one of 34 phyla, the broadest taxonomic groups, each representing a fundamentally different morphological way of being an animal. The more phyla present in an ecosystem, the more genetic and species diversity will be present.

Rainforests cover an area 20 times greater than coral reefs, and in all their trees, soil, air, and leaf litter, we can find animals from nine phyla. If we add the life in the rivers that flow through the rainforests, we can push this number to 17. Coral reefs support 32 phyla.

We shouldn't be surprised because ocean life has had time on its side. Multicellular animal life started evolving in the ocean about a billion years before it did on land. Modern coral reefs only cover about 1% of the ocean floor, yet they support at least a quarter of all marine species. This incredible concentration of diversity makes them clearly the most valuable biological systems we share the planet with.

Nature's Hidden Value

Reefs silently serve humanity in a host of ways. Across more than a hundred countries, coral reefs act as living breakwaters. In addition to protecting coastlines, the reefs provide food and create employment and income through healthy fishing practices and tourism dollars. The most recent global study says coral reefs provide goods and services worth roughly $2.7 trillion per year in the form of coastal protection, fisheries, tourism, and even biomedical compounds found in the reef biodiversity.

There isn't one reason why reefs brim with life, but we can start to put the pieces together by zooming out and looking at our planet's patterns of biodiversity. Biodiversity typically peaks in places with lots of energy, space, and time. On land, species numbers are greatest in the humid tropics where the sun's energy and water are abundant. In the ocean, the biodiversity hotspots are finer-grained, influenced in part by currents and upwelling, but most critically, the availability of shallow water energized by the power of sunlight.

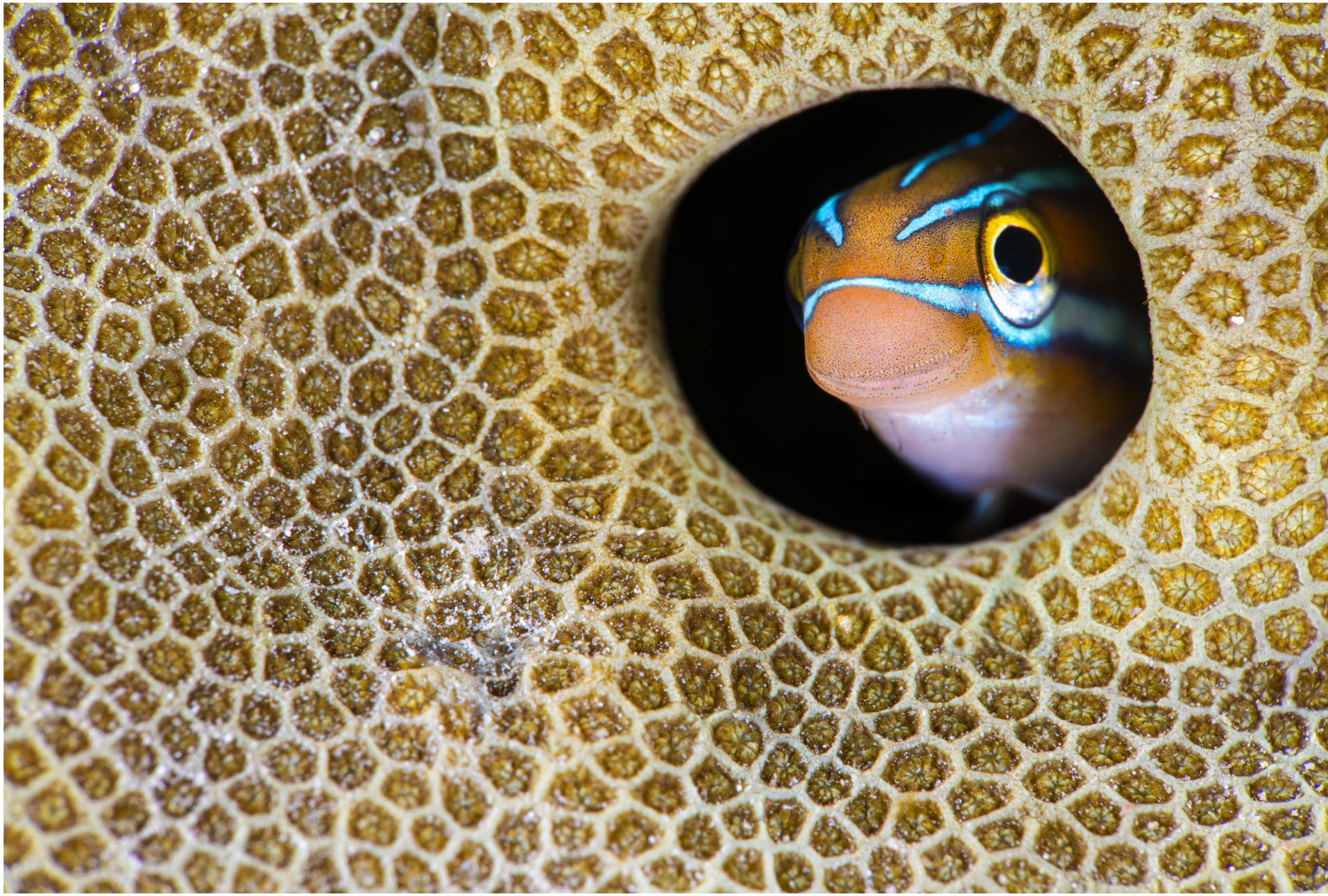
Reefs don't cover much of the ocean, but they deliver space through habitat complexity unmatched by any other ecosystem. Reefs are characterized by a three-dimensional framework of walls, pinnacles, caverns, canyons, spurs, buttresses, boulders, plates, and branches. Such intricate structures multiply biological niches and, therefore, species numbers.

P34-35: Lembeh Strait, Sulawesi, Indonesia The closer you look, the more you see. A four-lobed porcelain crab extends its feeding arms to strain plankton while nestled in the nook of a soft coral.

→ Vatu-i-Ra Conservation Park, Fiji Reefs are characterized by both expansive structures and complex details. Sea fans spread out to fill every gap so they can trap every particle of food the currents waft through their branches.

Masters of Symbiosis
The reef's architecture is built on a partnership: Coral polyps are tiny animals that cohabit with microscopic photosynthetic housemates, the zooxanthellae. These microalgae live symbiotically within the coral, converting sunlight and carbon dioxide into sugars, passing as much as 90% to their hosts. This energy windfall helps corals construct entire landscapes in waters where nutrients are scarce.

You may have also heard reefs called "cities in the sea," which I do think is apt. The structure, the different jobs, the density of life, the rush hours, and the relationships are as intricate as any urban web. Few species characterize reef life more than anemonefish. The well-known anemonefish live among the stinging tentacles of sea anemones, coating themselves in anemone mucus, preventing stings while they defend, clean, and even feed their hosts.



P38-39: Komodo National Park, Indonesia
Extreme specialization and the structural complexity allow so much life to co-exist in a tiny area. Reefs are home to hundreds of goby species. This type of ghost goby lives only within the branches of soft corals.

→ Misool Marine Reserve, Raja Ampat, Indonesia
Reef-building corals create habitat for a multitude of species, sometimes quite literally in the case of this bluestriped fangblenny.

The Coleman's shrimp spends its adult life on a single spot on a fire urchin. The shrimps, usually found in mated pairs, create a postage-stamp patch cleared of urchin spines, benefiting from the host's venomous nature to repel predators. Both are classic examples of symbiosis or "living together," where two different species form a close, long-term interaction.

These relationships, which often evolve together, can be beneficial, harmful, or neutral for each of the organisms involved. It's easy to see how reefs invite such specialization. The habitat and biological complexity create the opportunity, while the stability of these habitats provides the time for commitment.



Misool Marine Reserve, Raja Ampat, Indonesia Out of 1,000 species of anemone, only 10 anemone host anemonefish. While there are 28 species, of anemonefish, this spinecheek only lives in one species, the bulb tentacle anemone.



A Changing Planet
But times are changing. One hundred and fifty years ago, there were a billion humans on Earth, the majority living unmechanized lives. Since then, human numbers have swelled eight times, with each of us leaving a much heftier footprint on the natural world. “Biomass,” the weight of life, is a term used to understand the importance of animal groups in an ecosystem. It allows us to compare lots of small ones to a few big ones. There are 6,500 species of mammals on Earth. In biomass terms, wild mammals account for just 5%. Ninety-five percent of mammal biomass is humans and our livestock. It’s little wonder that our activities are having such a profound impact on Mother Nature.

Lembeh Strait, Sulawesi, Indonesia Even the most unappealing niches, such as the warning-red, venomous spines of a fire urchin, can make the perfect home for a pair of Coleman shrimp.

Reefs Under Pressure
Coral reef systems are under threat, however, and nearly every challenge facing reefs starts with us humans. A warming planet pushes corals beyond their thermal limits. Prolonged heatwaves sever the coral–algae partnership and leave colonies bleached, vulnerable to disease, and starved to death. Ocean acidification reduces carbonate saturation, making it more difficult for corals to build reefs. Pollution and sediment from coastal development smother polyps and feed algal blooms while overfishing removes grazers and predators, eroding the ecological balance. Even escaped pets can wreak havoc, such as the invasive lionfish that have become super-predators on Caribbean reefs.

Global studies found that from 2009 to 2018, reef systems lost about 14% of their living coral, driven by mass bleaching events and local stressors. Sadly, in 2009, the reefs were already significantly degraded, so to degrade by 14% is significant. Scientists warn that if the Earth's warming continues, up to 90% of coral reefs may disappear by 2050.



Misool Marine Reserve, Raja Ampat, Indonesia A massive and old stony coral colony bleached in unusually hot water. Happily, this colony recovered. Critical to its recovery, the colony was healthy and free of other stressors in a well-managed protected area, allowing it to grow back.



Hope From Apo Island
Yet, against these pressures, individuals and communities are standing up and making a difference. The Philippines lies in the heart of the Coral Triangle, the region that supports the richest coral reefs. This same small archipelago is also home to over 100 million people. Until the early 1980s, Apo Island was fished heavily, using destructive methods such as dynamite, cyanide, and muro-ari, a practice where fish are driven into a net by beating the reef with rocks and ropes. These methods don't just remove the fish, but they damage the very ecosystem that supports them; it's like harvesting oranges by chopping down the trees each year.

I mention Apo Island because this was one of the first reefs to course correct. In 1982, A biologist convinced the community on Apo Island to fully protect a portion of their reef. Dr. Alcala took Apo residents to other island reefs to show the islanders how rich, healthy, and bountiful reefs could be.

Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park, Philippines
Many reefs are under the thumb of human pressures, and it's easy to collectively forget how they thrum with life when given the protection to thrive. A trevally harasses clouds of axil-spot chromis, waiting for one to misstep and fall prey.



The Apo islanders agreed to create protected marine areas, and it took a few years to have an impact, but by 1988, corals and fish were recovering fast. By 1993, the number of large predatory fish had increased, signifying a healthy reef ecosystem. The islanders benefitted from a “spillover” effect, with fish abundance carried beyond the protected section of the reef. After years of reef protection, even the inherently pessimistic fishermen admitted they were now catching twice as many fish as a decade earlier, and they also benefited from tourism income.

Raja Ampat’s Revival

For many of us, the coral realm reaches its zenith around a cluster of islands in Indonesia’s far eastern corner, better known as Raja Ampat. The word “pristine” is often used, although it wasn’t untouched when I first visited 20 years ago. But even back then, it was easy to conclude that these were the most spectacular reefs I’d ever seen, with perfect coral growth like a spring garden and fish galore.

Misool Marine Reserve, Raja Ampat, Indonesia
Reef real estate is never wasted in the heart of the Coral Triangle. Multiple genera of soft corals explode out into the current to strain passing morsels of food.

One of only a handful of places in the universe where biodiversity is improving rather than declining.

There are a lot more divers now, but far more noticeable is that there are a lot more fish, turtles, rays, and sharks. I didn't see a single shark or manta on my 2006 trip, as the area was fished and targeted by shark-finners. These days, almost every dive yields reef sharks (greys, whitetips, or blacktips) and hammerheads, threshers, and even tiger sharks are spotted from time to time. And it's now arguably the best place in the world to see manta rays. An upward trend is rare anywhere in the oceans, but that it's happening in arguably the epicenter of biodiversity is extraordinarily encouraging.

What's the secret formula? There's no magic, just sound marine conservation. When Marit and Andrew Miners founded Misool Resort in 2005, they had the foresight to co-create a 300,000-acre marine protected area (MPA), funded by the resort and employing a team of 15 rangers from local villages. Scientific surveys show fish biomass increased by an average of 248% between 2007 and 2021, while baited-video data indicate shark numbers up 190% since 2012. "Misool represents one of the most pristine reef systems left on earth," comments coral reef ecologist Dr. Mark Erdmann. "One of only a handful of places in the universe where biodiversity is improving rather than declining." Importantly, the success isn't only ecological but also social. Local people used to live off the reefs, slowly killing them, while now the islanders benefit financially from protecting the reefs.



Misool Marine Protected Area, Raja Ampat, Indonesia Coral reef — two words, but a huge variety of species, a DNA databank, food source, vacation wonderland, and robust coastal protection. All jobs they do best when they're thriving.



The Conservation Blueprint
Across the coral realm, MPAs have expanded and matured, often integrating mangroves and seagrasses to protect crucial ecological arteries that carry energy and life between the associated habitats. Time and again, the most effective MPAs are those co-designed with local stakeholders, with zoning that respects traditional practices and enforcement that builds pride and ownership. Get it right and reef biodiversity rebounds, fish schools thicken, and the benefits flood in.

Despite the ocean's ability to rebound, conservation isn't solely about setting aside space; it's also about tackling root causes. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions is imperative to slow warming and acidification. Improving water quality on land stops pollution and sediments from reaching and suffocating reefs. Ending destructive fishing restores ecosystem function.

North Malé Atoll, Maldives Reefs that are protected from exploitation show a bulging in the food chain as it fills out and big fish return. Scientists clearly see that reefs with more fish biomass have less algae and healthier corals.

The approach is multifaceted and includes protecting herbivores that keep algae in check (parrotfish), safeguarding apex predators (sharks and groupers) that keep balance throughout the food chain and ensuring that reef-building corals are as diverse and healthy as possible to cope with stressors. For coral reefs, biodiversity becomes a form of insurance. In diverse communities, there are lots of reef builders, herbivores, and predators. If one species falter, others can carry the load.

A Lifeline of Diversity

It's now widely documented that spending time in nature has a measurable health benefit for people, both emotionally and physically. I can't help but conclude that the wilder the nature, the further away it takes us from our daily lives and the more beneficial it must be.

There's nothing on land like a coral reef. Diving into reef diversity and witnessing reef life, such as symbiosis, not only enriches our visit, but that biodiversity is also a lifeline to humans and the ocean.

---

*See more of **Dr. Alex Mustard**'s work at www.amustard.com.*



→ Gardens of the Queen National Park, Cuba Sharks remain in trouble globally, but locally, protection is seeing the magnificent animals reclaim their place as a keystone species in a fully restored ecosystem. Large predatory fish and sharks indicate a healthy reef system.

P58-59: Dampier Strait Marine Protected Area, Raja Ampat, Indonesia Coral reefs are characterized by biological abundance and diversity. Here, thick schools of glassy cardinalfish sweep over a hard coral reef.

Capturing Stars

Memories Written in Light

WORDS AND IMAGES BY CHRISTINE KENYON





I was sitting on the floor, albums spread around me, turning pages I hadn't looked at in years. Many of the albums were filled with prints from photography workshops my father led throughout the American West. These were the trips when my love of photography and the vast, star-filled skies of the west first took hold.

As I turned the pages, the images shifted from landscapes to glimpses of another time: My father, surrounded by marble columns at the Smithsonian, where he served as Chief of the Office of Photography, and a first-grade version of me visiting him there, smiling awkwardly at the camera. Even now, decades later, I found myself quietly amused that I could still recognize Kodachrome 64 from Ektachrome at a glance.

I was drawn to a single image of our workshop group, standing outside a 1-Hour Photo in Durango, Colorado, waiting to pick up our prints. There I was among the people in the old photo, clearly the kid in the group.

As I browsed the pages of faded photographs, carefully placed in the sleeves by my father years ago, it struck me that the one special place that had defined the trip for me was nowhere to be found. I was 13 then, just a passenger watching out the window of my Dad's car, so I couldn't have found it on a map, and I didn't even know what it was called.

P60-61: Mount Rainier National Park, Washington Towering above the roadway as I approached, wildflowers and open meadows stretched beneath the massive form of Mount Rainier. The night remained luminous — its snow-capped dome casting a quiet glow across the landscape.

← Shiprock, New Mexico While dialing in exposure for a time-lapse at Shiprock, a test frame revealed an unexpected glow—aurora stretching deep into the south, tinting the sky with red and orange hues.



Utah Badlands, Utah In this lunar-like landscape, the terrain shifts like a chameleon with the light, from charcoal gray to soft mauve, as if you've touched down on a distant planet.



Bisti Wilderness, New Mexico Stepping into this dramatic landscape feels surreal, as wind and water have carved towering, mushroom-like hoodoos, creating the uncanny sense of being small — like stepping into the world of Gulliver's Travels.



Utah Badlands, Utah From the edge of the Utah Badlands, as the land falls away, a rainbow of light stretches overhead in quiet harmony with the sculpted moonscape below.

I made a quiet bargain with myself, “Leave. You can always turn around and come back.”

Answering the Call
I paused and looked out the window, the album still open in my lap. Now I felt oddly incomplete, daydreaming about going back to find it again. Besides, driving the open road had always brought me a sense of freedom.

It took several weeks to sort through the details and convince myself I was really going. One morning, I stood in the driveway beside a packed car, staring at the route I had mapped across the West — nearly 7,000 miles. Suddenly, the trip no longer felt romantic or nostalgic. It felt enormous. For several long minutes, I wasn’t sure I could do it; not sure I could leave. I made a quiet bargain with myself, “Leave. You can always turn around and come back.”

My two Labradors waited in the back of my SUV, watching me. I reached through the open window to scratch their heads before climbing behind the wheel. I sat for a moment and wrote in my journal, “September 1, 2004: I’m heading west.”

The 7,000-mile route carried me from Maryland, first through the South and across the plains of Texas, reconnecting me with friends and family I hadn’t seen in years.

Miles of highway turned into two-lane roads, windows down, radio up, singing along. I got to Durango. As I entered the roundabout in the center of town, the Jackalope was still there. I smiled when I saw it, unchanged, waiting, as if it had been holding that pose for me all these years.

From there, I headed north on Route 550, gaining elevation through Silverton and over Red Mountain Pass. Fall had arrived in full color, but this time I wasn’t loading film. I was filling a memory card.

The next small town was quintessentially Western, beautiful, and reminded me of the Alps. I didn’t recognize the place, and nothing in it stirred any memory. Beyond it, the road climbed quickly — steeply — hairpin turn, one after another, the valley falling away behind me. Then I felt anticipation followed by a sudden, unfamiliar fear. It didn’t make sense. There was no reason for it. Might this be the place?

The feeling hung on as the road turned again and again. At the top, there was a turnout. I pulled over without thinking, stepped out, and turned back to look. And there it was — Ouray. Tears came quietly, without effort. And in that moment, I felt my dad.

I lingered there for quite some time. Eventually, I got back in the car and continued. Then it came to me. I hadn’t recognized the place because we had approached from the North. This had been my first view of it as a child, even if I couldn’t have named it. Although it wasn’t in the album, the memory had never left me.

→ Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming Chasing clear skies through a season of wildfire smoke, Wyoming offered one fleeting night of clarity beneath the stars. The Perseid meteor shower didn’t disappoint.

P70-71: Eastern Sierra Nevada, California In the cool of the night, under a blanket of stars, just after the moon sets, the Milky Way reveals itself in full splendor. A mere speck, I’m immersed in its quiet majesty.



← Alabama Hills, California Milky Way on the rocks of the Eastern Sierra Nevada, its glow illuminating massive, smooth, organic forms scattered playfully throughout this mesmerizing terrain.

↑ Mount Rainier National Park, Washington One of the most vivid displays of airglow I've ever witnessed — shades of lime, aqua, green, and blue light splashed across the night sky above Mount Rainier.



Beneath Familiar Stars
That night, I camped among the spruce, evergreen fragrance hanging in the cool mountain air. After the sun slipped behind the peaks and the last warmth faded from the day, I laid out a blanket and stretched out on the ground. My two dogs settled in beside me. In the stillness, I looked up.

It had been years, but I remembered the feeling. The sky was impossibly wide above me, and the Milky Way stretched overhead like a ribbon of lace. I whispered, “Thank you, Dad. I’m here because of you.”

For a moment, I was back there as a child, lying on a blanket, surrounded by my dad and the others, all of us looking up into the night sky together. I didn’t even think about my camera. I knew I couldn’t make a picture. So instead, that night, I made a memory.

Before I put out the campfire, I opened my journal, “September 15, 2004: Today I found more than I was looking for, and tonight I saw the stars the way I remember them. Wish I could photograph them … maybe someday.”

Finding Myself
It had been three days since Ouray. The road had carried me through hundreds of miles of open country, small towns, long stretches of nothing, and endless skies.

Somewhere along the road, I realized I wasn’t as lonely as I thought I would be. I was alone, yes — but I wasn’t lonely. I wasn’t becoming someone new. I was being introduced to myself. And almost without noticing, I understood — since the moment I left, I hadn’t once thought to turn around and go home.

Over the next two weeks, the road carried me through the rest of Colorado into Wyoming, across Utah’s red rock country and beyond, each place unfolding with its own unmistakable beauty. At that point, I had documented the journey — both in photographs and in the pages of my journal.

By the time I headed home, I had rescued a dog, and with him and my labs, the drive didn’t feel nearly as long.

When I finally pulled into the driveway, I sat for a moment before turning off the engine. Then I wrote in my journal, “October 1, 2004: The trip of a lifetime…”

A New Direction
Not long after, this experience began to take on a life of its own. Less than two years later, I returned to Utah — this time by plane — to purchase the property where I’d build the home I live in today. By the spring of 2007, I had made the move.

I continued running my public relations firm. On most weekends, I was in my 4Runner exploring the back roads of Utah with my dogs.

By 2016, a shift had become undeniable. In the years after my dad had passed, I stepped away from my public relations work, including contracts with Fortune 500 companies, and began mapping out a new direction — one centered entirely around photography.

I didn’t fully know what that would look like yet, but I knew I was all in.

Bisti Wilderness, New Mexico “Alien eggs” in the quiet light of blue hour, set against a Milky Way rising from the desert floor — captured on a mission nearly derailed by threatening storms and relentless lightning.



Alabama Hills, California The Milky Way rising above, casting its ancient light on time-worn stones that take on almost unmistakable forms, as though sculpted with intention — light revealing their quiet familiarity.



Canyonlands National Park, Utah Here, the land seems ruptured, revealing scars of millennia. Our Earth — sometimes generous, sometimes hostile — always beckoning us to explore and discover what lies within.



The Milky Way stretched overhead like a ribbon of lace. I whispered, “Thank you, Dad. I’m here because of you.”

Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming
Rising steam creates an otherworldly atmosphere around a glowing aquamarine pool, set like a precious stone in a barren landscape — a scene that felt like a galactic geyser.



Following the Milky Way

Recalling all those nights under the stars, I began to feel drawn to night photography, specifically, the Milky Way. It wasn't nearly as common then as it is now, and the learning curve was steep. I studied what I could, piecing together techniques and tools, trying to understand how it all worked together.

I remember that August, wanting to photograph the Perseids but unsure of where to do so. One of the worst fire seasons in decades had blanketed the country in smoke, stretching from the West Coast across the plains and leaving few clear options.

In my studio, with the dogs at my feet, I worked through the possibilities, knowing my chances of finding clear skies were slim. Still, I kept looking, hoping for even the smallest break. Eventually, I found one — a narrow clearing over Yellowstone. It wasn't perfect, but it was enough. It was the best shot I had.

I loaded the dogs into the 4Runner and headed out, arriving just in time to catch the last light. I worked quickly, knowing I wouldn't have another chance to shoot the geyser in the brief moments before the sky gave way to night.

The air was still, the silence complete, and everything felt suspended. With multiple cameras aimed at the sky, I spent hours beneath the Milky Way and meteor shower while the clear skies held. Then, I could see it beginning to shift; the smoke was slowly reclaiming the sky. I kept working as long as I could, knowing the window was closing.

By morning, as we made our way south through the Tetons, the peaks were barely visible, choked in haze, the landscape reduced to ghostly forms and memory. A 24-hour stretch for a few hours of sky, but it was enough.

A Life Among Stars

Afterward, I took every opportunity to follow the Milky Way. Each time, I understood a little more about what it took. What had once felt uncertain had become intentional. I was following what I had felt years earlier, lying on a blanket beneath the Colorado sky, seeing the stars for the first time.

The more I explored, the more I captured — the more I shared, the more I was discovered by companies like Nikon, Adobe, and Really Right Stuff.

Over the years, the road has carried me farther than I ever imagined, chasing the stars across landscapes that once felt impossibly distant, to the geothermal pools of Yellowstone glowing beneath the night sky, the red rock arches of Utah where the Milky Way bends across stone carved by time, and Shiprock rising from the desert floor where star trails circle above it in silence.

Each place, a moment. Each moment, a photograph. Together, a life I never could have planned but somehow found by following the stars.

The truck is packed, and my yellow Lab, Aspen, waits by the door. We'll be on the road again soon, headed back to a place I recently discovered. When the Milky Way rises, I'll be there to meet it.

---

*See more of **Christine Kenyon**'s work at www.christinekenyon.com.*

Grand Staircase–Escalante National Monument, Utah
As if rising from the desert floor, a natural window frames the Milky Way, opening a quiet passage between earth and sky.

The Voice of Zion

Chasing the Magic

WORDS AND IMAGES BY KAREN HUTTON

REAL CONSERVATION BEGINS when a place stops being scenery. That realization followed me home from Zion National Park in Utah after a FUJIFILM assignment for a project called “The Great American Road Trip.”

I had chosen Zion because I’d only driven through it once before, during the national park closures, and even then, I could feel something in the landscape photography tugging at me. I wanted to return and really explore it. To listen for its voice.

The Challenge

Then FUJIFILM came up with a project. The company assigned me the FUJIFILM GFX 100s and FUJINON GF120mm macro lens, and the genre of landscape, and sent me out to see what I could create. I got to choose the park.

This assignment was already challenging — landscape photography in a national park with a macro lens. But hey, why not raise the bar a bit more? I planned my trip to Zion.

P82-83: Evening light reveals the layers of sandstone formations and the immense scale of Kolob Terrace. FUJIFILM GFX100S, FUJINON GF 120mm f/4 Macro R LM OIS WR, f/8, ISO 2500

→ Autumn leaves and blue groundcover create an intricate conversation on the forest floor of Kolob Canyons. FUJIFILM GFX100S, FUJINON GF 120mm f/4 Macro R LM OIS WR, f/5.6, ISO 800





Zion is one of the grandest landscapes in the American West — towering sandstone walls, immense canyons, sweeping geological drama stretching back roughly 150 million years. Most people associate macro photography with tiny subjects and close-up detail work, not vast national parks.

To most, the pairing of macro and grand landscape seemed contradictory, but to me, that was where the fun began. I've always enjoyed pushing perceptions of what a lens is "supposed to do" into the realms of "what else can it do?" What can it let me see differently? I was excited to see this iconic place through this completely unexpected lens choice. I knew it would bring the unexpected, and I welcomed it.

Recalibrating My Vision

Naturally, the first few days in Zion required a complete recalibration. Out went any pre-conceived ideas of typical Zion compositions. Forget anything I had ever seen online or in magazines. I thought I had cleansed my inner palette of those, but looking through that macro brought me back to ground zero.

I had to find a whole new way to orient myself. Not just physically within the park, but perceptually. The GF120 saw the park nothing like my eyes did. Places like the Court of the Patriarchs and some of the larger canyon scenes called for an entirely different visual conversation.

Technically, distances compressed differently. Layers stacked into one another. The camera's sensor itself created these extraordinary planes of detail and depth that felt almost three-dimensional.



P86-87: Evening light colors the peaks and forest with golden autumn, in this 6-image panoramic of Canyon Junction.
FUJIFILM GFX100S, FUJINON GF 120mm f/4 Macro R LM OIS WR, F/11, ISO 500

→ Autumn foliage glows in reflected light beneath the darkened walls of Zion Canyon.
FUJIFILM GFX100S, FUJINON GF 120mm f/4 Macro R LM OIS WR, f/8, ISO 640



The crowds thinned. The pace softened. The landscape seemed to exhale.

So, clearing my mind of as many pre-conceived ideas as I could sweep out, I began asking questions as I peered through the lens. (The brain loves to answer questions; it's hard-wired for it.) "Where's the story? What do YOU see?"

One of my favorite things to do is talk to my gear. Doing this always helps me discover ideas, angles, and storylines I'd have never noticed otherwise.

It took a bit to find my stride, but once I surrendered the assumption that I already knew how to photograph the park, something shifted inside. My pace changed — it slowed and became more assured at the same time.

I began to experience an entirely new level of awe. I found myself gasping at the beauty and poignancy pouring through my lens. The stories, the juxtapositions — suddenly the voice of the place became unmistakable.

That was the moment everything fell into place. No more seeking out iconic vistas and capturing them. Now I was being drawn into them. Receiving what they had to say. That changed the game entirely.

Weathered sandstone patterns carve winding paths across the surface of Checkerboard Mesa.
FUJIFILM GFX100S, FUJINON GF 120mm f/4 Macro R LM OIS WR, f/20, ISO 640



Fresh Eyes

One of the gifts of choosing a park I'd never visited before was that I had very little muscle memory to rely on. There were no favorite overlooks. No established routines. No mental catalog of shots I needed to come home with. Just curiosity. And a macro lens. As the days unfolded, I began to realize that Zion isn't a single experience. It's a collection of distinct voices.

The main canyon has one rhythm. The east side speaks another language entirely. The pale Navajo Sandstone catches light differently there, giving the landscape a brighter, more textured feel. Bighorn sheep move through the terrain as if they belong to the rock itself. More people find their way there, too.

Kolob Terrace feels different still. The Kolob Canyons area, which quickly became a favorite, possessed a quieter, more contemplative presence than some of the park's more heavily visited areas.

The crowds thinned. The pace softened. The landscape seemed to exhale. Each section asked different questions. Each required a different kind of attention.

Part of the challenge was practical. My husband was filming the project while dealing with a bad knee, so every day became a balancing act between finding the photographs I wanted to make and identifying locations where we could realistically capture video footage.

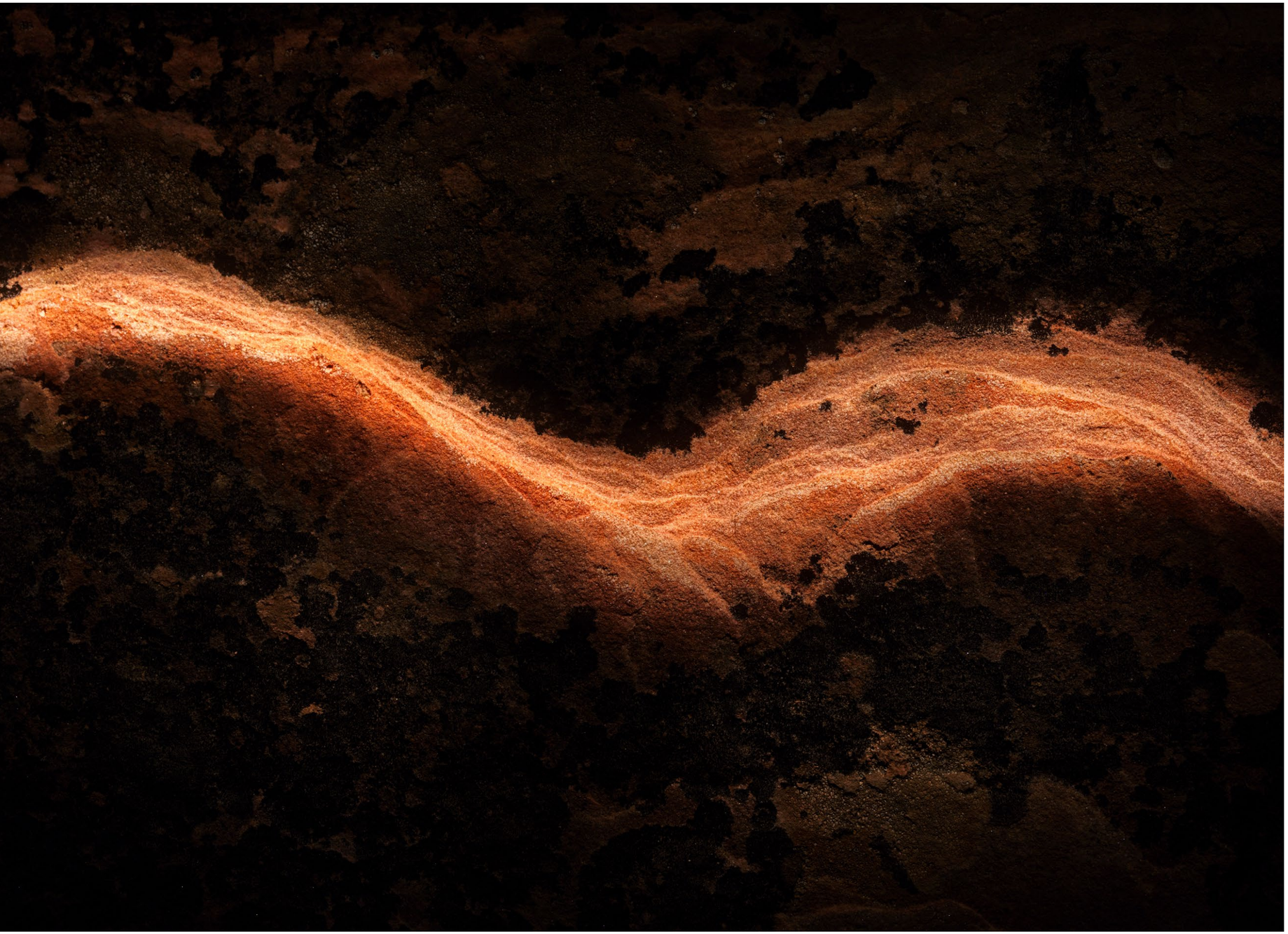
I scouted two stories at once: one through the viewfinder and one through the camera filming me. Sometimes that meant hiking. Sometimes it meant driving. Sometimes it meant finding creative ways to move through the landscape while conserving both time and energy.

One of our best decisions was renting electric bikes to explore Zion. Suddenly, we weren't locked into shuttle stops or parking areas. We could move slowly. Stop whenever something caught our attention. Turn around. Wait for light. Follow curiosity.

That slower pace became the director of experience. The canyon became less of a place to photograph and more of a place to listen.

P92-93: Spilling through the top of the canyon, light illuminates layers of sandstone and trees deep within the park.
FUJIFILM GFX100S, FUJINON GF 120mm f/4 Macro R LM OIS WR, f/14, ISO 400

→ Autumn shadows and light soften the layers and textures of sandstone and trees within Zion Canyon.
FUJIFILM GFX100S, FUJINON GF 120mm f/4 Macro R LM OIS WR, f/10, ISO 1600



The Direction of Light

What fascinated me most was how differently the GF120 interpreted distance. A lens like this doesn't simply magnify details. It reorganizes relationships. Distances compressed gently. Depth of field sharpened the stories. Subjects that might have felt disconnected with a wider lens suddenly became part of the same visual sentence.

The longer I worked with it, the more I stopped thinking about what the lens couldn't do and became fascinated by what it could do. The assignment had started as a constraint, but now it felt like an invitation.

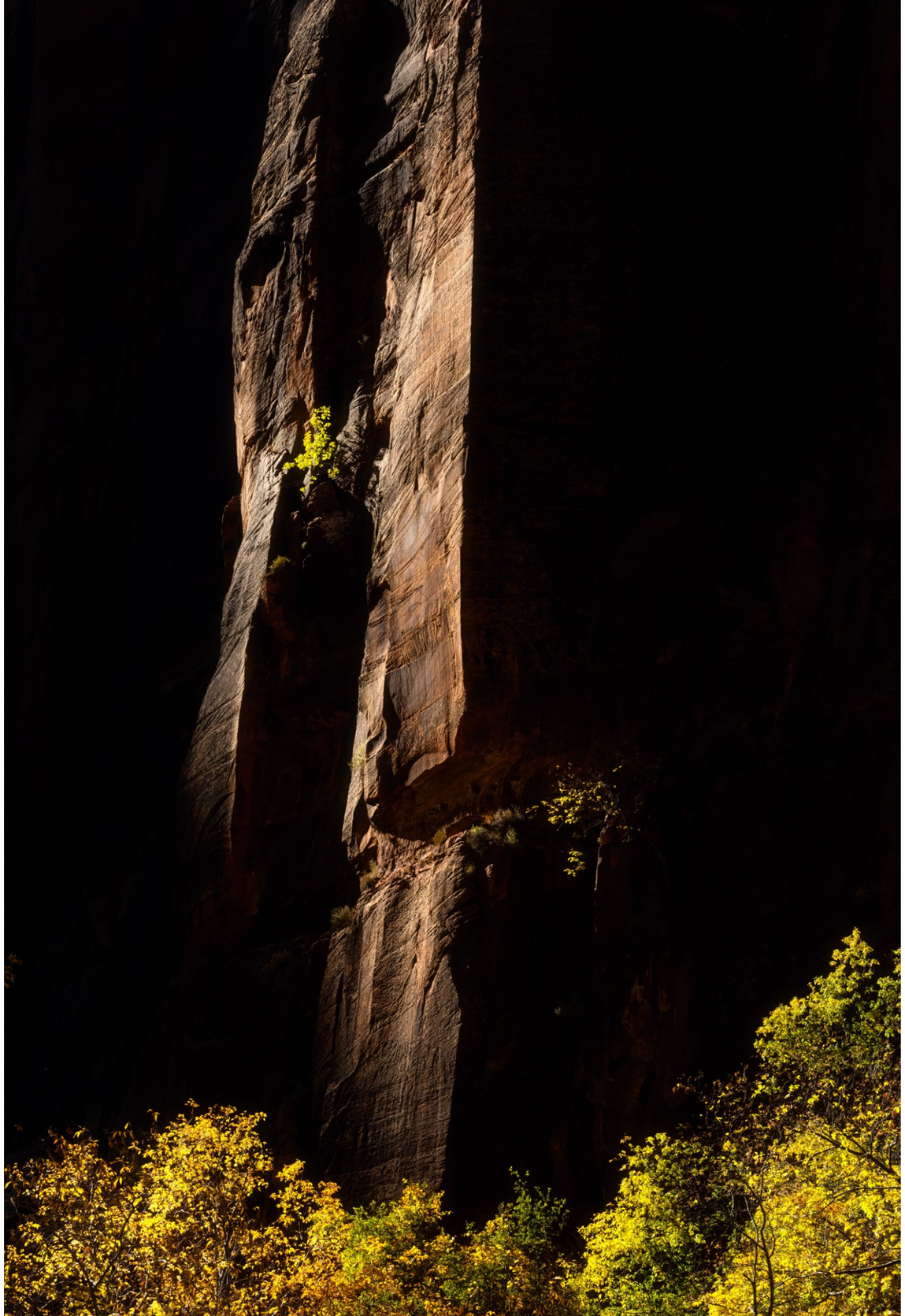
I found myself lingering over things I might otherwise have walked past. Patterns in Navajo Sandstone that looked like frozen waves. Leaves stamped into wind-shaped sand. Tiny trees growing from impossible cracks in sheer rock walls. The way autumn color transformed entire sections of canyon into intricate tapestries of gold, rust, green, and red. The way reflected light could completely redefine a scene. That last one became a particular obsession.

In many landscapes, light arrives directly from the sky. In Zion, light often arrives indirectly. It bounces, reflects, breathes. It spills from unexpected directions and illuminates parts of the landscape that seem impossible until you're standing there watching it happen.

The canyon walls themselves become participants in the light. At times, they seemed less like stone and more like enormous reflectors, gathering sunlight and redistributing it throughout the landscape.

P96-97: Autumn sunset highlights trees along the Virgin River beneath the canyon walls of the Temple of Sinawava.
FUJIFILM GFX100S, FUJINON GF 120mm f/4 Macro R LM OIS WR, f/20, ISO 800

← Light reveals an intricate outline within weathered Navajo Sandstone on Kolob Terrace.
FUJIFILM GFX100S, FUJINON GF 120mm f/4 Macro R LM OIS WR, f/26, ISO 320



You experience shifting distances, reflected light, textures, curves, shadow rhythms, and weathered sandstone patterns.

Entire worlds emerged from those interactions. A wall that appeared flat suddenly revealed texture and depth. A shadowed grove began to glow. A solitary tree became the focal point of an entire canyon. The park kept teaching me the same lesson over and over again: Pay attention. Then pay more attention.

What struck me most wasn't how much there was to see. It was how much became visible once I stopped trying to direct the experience and simply participate in it. The lens had altered my pace. That altered my attention. And attention altered my relationship with the place itself.

By then, I had stopped worrying about whether I was making the kinds of photographs people expected from Zion. The park had become far more interesting than my expectations of it.

I was no longer looking for proof that a macro lens could photograph a grand landscape. I was discovering how a grand landscape could reveal itself through a macro lens. That distinction changed everything. What began as a technical challenge had quietly become an exercise in attention. The more closely I looked, the more the park revealed.

Not just details, but relationships. Conversations between light and stone, weather and time, color and texture. The photographs were simply where those conversations became visible.

Zion is fascinating because of its scope and grandeur, but what most people miss is that it's also deeply intimate. You're often inside the canyons looking up rather than looking down into them.

You experience shifting distances, reflected light, textures, curves, shadow rhythms, and weathered sandstone patterns. The park reveals itself in layers. And the macro lens amplified that feeling. Scale stopped being the dominant organizing principle. Intimacy replaced spectacle.

The more time I spent with the lens, the more I realized that I was learning to see relationships differently. Light against texture. Curves against shadow. Evergreen against impossibly red stone. Fall leaves grasping their branch for one more ray of light. Reflected glow spilling across canyon walls. Epic, I realized, isn't a matter of size. It's a matter of design.

P100-101: Reflected light colors Kolob Canyons a fiery red, revealing layers of color that contrast with evergreen trees. FUJIFILM X-T5, FUJINON XF 30mm f/2.8 R LM WR Macro, f/11, ISO 1000

← Light and shadow carve through Zion's sheer walls, illuminating a lone tree high within the canyon. FUJIFILM GFX100S, FUJINON GF 120mm f/4 Macro R LM OIS WR, f/16, ISO 500

One of the biggest surprises was Zion's light. I expected dramatic canyon light, of course, but I didn't expect the sheer amount of reflected light constantly bouncing through the park.

Canyon walls themselves become luminous, but not from direct light — from the reflection of it. The way light spills through crevices and canyon openings, ricocheting across sandstone and illuminating entire worlds within worlds.

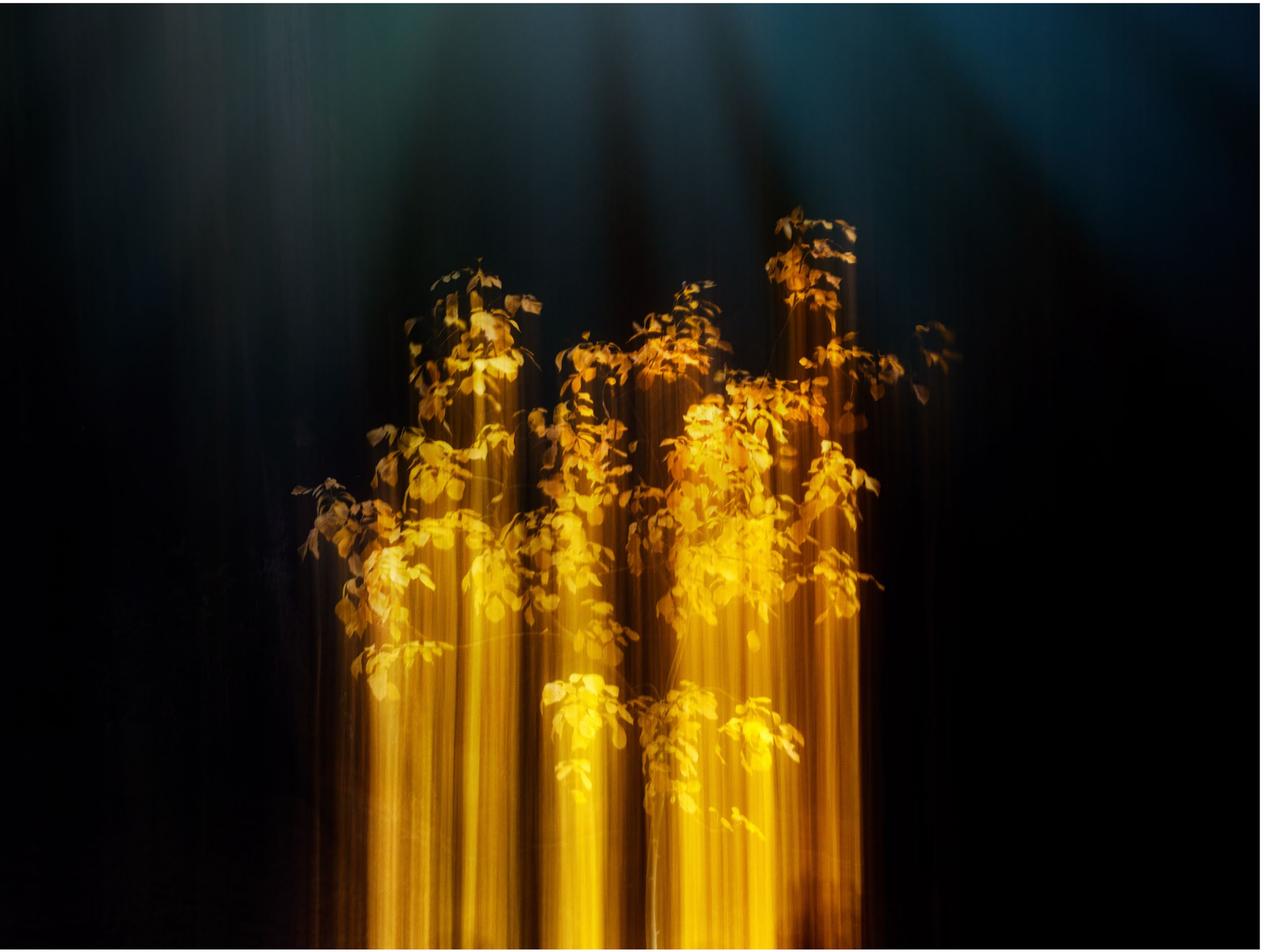
At the Temple of Sinawava, if you arrive at exactly the right moment, the reflected light becomes almost theatrical. Miss that window, and it's as if someone shut the whole thing off. The difference can be astonishing. Timing in Zion isn't just important — it's everything.

I became obsessed with those transitions. The way light hummed through smoke and atmosphere in Kolob Canyons. The way shadow carved rhythm into sandstone. The way distant layers compressed softly into one another through the wizardry of the GFX 100s/ GF120 combination. The way weather and erosion had sculpted patterns into Navajo Sandstone that looked like frozen waves.



P104-105: Reflected light and flowing water reveal abstract patterns along the canyon floor at Court of the Patriarchs. FUJIFILM GFX100S, FUJINON GF 120mm f/4 Macro R LM OIS WR, f/11, ISO 200

→ Light and shadow define flowing patterns of weathered paths carved into Navajo Sandstone on Kolob Terrace. FUJIFILM GFX100S, FUJINON GF 120mm f/4 Macro R LM OIS WR, f/14, ISO 640



Learning From a Lens

Everywhere I looked, the landscape felt expressive. Not scenery. Expression. The formations looked almost hand-carved, though they were entirely natural. Wind, water, time, pressure. Nature drawing slowly across stone over unimaginable spans of time. Those moments didn't feel separate from the larger landscapes. They were the larger landscapes. That was the revelation.

The macro lens never diminished Zion's grandeur. If anything, it deepened it by inviting me into a closer, more rarified relationship with it. The park's massive scale remained fully present, but it stopped dominating my attention. Instead, every detail became part of a larger living conversation — texture, light, distance, atmosphere, silence, shape, rhythm.

This wasn't about me solving a visual challenge. I was inhabiting the landscape differently, and that matters. Photography influences not only what we see but how connected we feel to a place. People protect what they feel connected to.

Conservation doesn't begin with data, warnings, or even beautiful photographs. It begins when a place stops being a backdrop and becomes a relationship. When attention deepens enough that the land no longer feels decorative or distant —but alive with presence, detail, and meaning — it becomes personal.

For me, Zion became all that through constraint. Through curiosity. Through slowed attention. Through allowing the lens to draw me into another way of seeing.

I went willingly. I entered the park knowing I was going to photograph a famous landscape. I left feeling like I'd been in a personal conversation with it. And somewhere in that shift — from spectacle to relationship, from hunting to receiving — the experience became something larger than photography itself.

---

*See more of **Karen Hutton**'s work at www.karenhuttonphotography.com.*

A moment of light captured shining on yellow leaves, put in motion by intentional camera movement.
FUJIFILM X-T5, FUJIFILM XF 18-135mm f/3.5-5.6 R LM OIS WR, f/14, ISO 400

Moo Deng, Neglected

WORDS AND IMAGE BY AARON GEKOSKI

AS A BABY PYGMY HIPPOPOTAMUS, Moo Deng became a global sensation. Millions watched videos of her playful antics, shared her images online, and helped turn her into one of the world's most recognizable young animals. Crowds gathered for a glimpse of the tiny pygmy hippo, cameras raised, eager to capture a moment with the internet's favorite zoo star.

Today, after generating millions of dollars in tourists' entry fees, the crowds at Khao Kheow Zoo have thinned. Media attention has moved elsewhere, as it always does. What remains is the reality of Moo Deng's daily existence.

Seen here alone in a barren concrete enclosure, Moo Deng drifts through dirty green water surrounded by rusting barriers and hard artificial surfaces. There's little enrichment, vegetation, or indication of the rich, dynamic environment that pygmy hippos would naturally inhabit in the forests and waterways of West Africa.

While the world celebrated Moo Deng's personality and charm as an infant, few people have continued to ask how she lives once the headlines faded. Viral fame can generate global attention, but it doesn't guarantee a life that meets an animal's behavioral and psychological needs. When the spotlight moves on, the enclosure remains.

And for Moo Deng, this is home.

---

*See more of **Aaron Gekoski**'s work at www.aarongekoski.com.*



Madagascar, Africa

WORDS AND IMAGES BY DANIEL J. COX





WILD LANDS

The Beginning

Madagascar, Africa



VISITING MADAGASCAR is like turning back the clock. It all began over 160 million years ago when the world's fourth-largest island began to break away from the massive, ancient supercontinent known as Gondwanaland.

P112-113: Menabe Region, Madagascar Baobab trees estimated to be 800 years old define the impressive "Avenue of the Baobabs." This unique natural area deserves better protection and is slated to become Madagascar's first natural monument, though the trees have been under pressure for years.

← Palmarium Reserve, Madagascar The critically endangered black-and-white ruffed lemur is especially adept at suspending from their feet to help them reach ripe fruit hanging from tall tree branches. These lemurs are highly specialized frugivores with about 75% to 90% of their wild diet consisting of mature canopy fruits.



The Beginning
Madagascar's journey began in two major stages. It first separated from Africa but was still connected to India, Antarctica, and Australia. Then, 90 million years ago, Madagascar broke away from India, becoming the world's fourth-largest island, settling in the southwest Indian Ocean. And here it has remained where it had prospered as a living laboratory, with over 80% of its animal and plant life evolving in isolation. Those were the good old days.

The island was largely free of human settlement until 350 and 550 AD. The first Austronesian settlers from present-day Borneo were fishermen who reached Madagascar's shores after traveling over 4,000 miles across the open ocean in advanced outrigger canoes. Several centuries later, Africans crossed the Mozambique Channel to join the Austronesians.

In a relatively short period of time, human settlement has had a radical impact on this island biodiversity hotspot. Roughly 10% of Madagascar's total land area is strictly protected. These reserves harbor most of the island's terrestrial vertebrates and plant species. But even protected areas fall under threat of deforestation, which plagues the island. Madagascar has lost approximately 50% to 80% of its original natural forest cover, with large swaths of forest lost annually.

A Biodiversity Hotspot
Thankfully, Madagascar's unique biodiversity has inspired NGOs from around the world to save what remains of this magnificent island and the animals that call it home.

The country's unique animals — endemic only to this island — the diverse landscape, and even the mass of humanity, are incredibly inspiring. It's the only place in the world where lemurs are native, boasting over 100 distinct species of these charismatic primates.

I became interested first in documenting the wildlife, but then, recognizing that tourism could be part of the answer to the island's financial imbalances, I brought workshops to support the island's tourism industry, demonstrating that natural resources have monetary value.

Madagascar is a landscape and wildlife photographer's paradise with so many interesting things to photograph. The most sought-after subjects, of course, are lemurs, second being chameleons, and third would be the rainforests and their small creatures. My favorite part of Madagascar includes the lower and central part of the country, which is more arid than the north.

Photography Hotspots
My favorite place to start is Morondava, where you can get a feel for the traditional fishing the island is known for. Not far from Morondava is the "Avenue of the Baobabs," a collection of baobab trees estimated to be over 800 years old. The area is in the process of being designated a natural monument. It's a wonderful spot to catch fiery sunsets, with the ancient trees silhouetted against the evening sky, creating dramatic landscapes. It's a popular place, and you'll have to navigate lots of people.

Of all the places I've photographed, Berenty is my favorite. It's a small private reserve with an intact natural habitat, referred to as a gallery forest, that was set aside by its original landowner for the benefit of local wildlife. Berenty boasts six lemur species and the largest colony of Madagascar fruit bats in southern Madagascar. Along with the gallery forest, you can take a night walk in the adjacent spiny forest, where the evening comes alive with uniquely nocturnal lemurs and other animals.

Berenty Reserve, Madagascar An endangered mother ring-tailed lemur, baby clinging to her back, feeds on non-native prickly pear cactus, which was introduced to Madagascar in 1769 by French colonists. The invasive species has profoundly impacted the ecosystem.



↑ **Berenty Reserve, Madagascar** The sleepy face of an endangered Petter's sportive lemur peers out from the cavity of a tree in the spiny forest at dusk. As a nocturnal lemur, this little guy's day is just beginning. One of the smaller sportive lemurs, this species lives in the spiny and dry forests of Southwestern Madagascar.

→ **Berenty Reserve, Madagascar** A critically endangered baby Verreaux's sifaka hangs on tight to the back of his mother. These lemurs navigate the trees by jumping from one to the next, sometimes dropping to the ground, where they use their hind legs to hop short distances across forest clearings, open fields, and meadows.

My favorite subjects at Berenty include the Verreaux's sifaka — a type of lemur — and the ring-tailed lemur. Both are present in substantial numbers. The Verreaux's sifaka is listed as critically endangered. The other star of Berenty is the ring-tailed lemur. It, too, is endangered. It's a highly social animal that lives in groups of 3 to 30 individuals, providing opportunities to photograph family portraits and moms with babies.

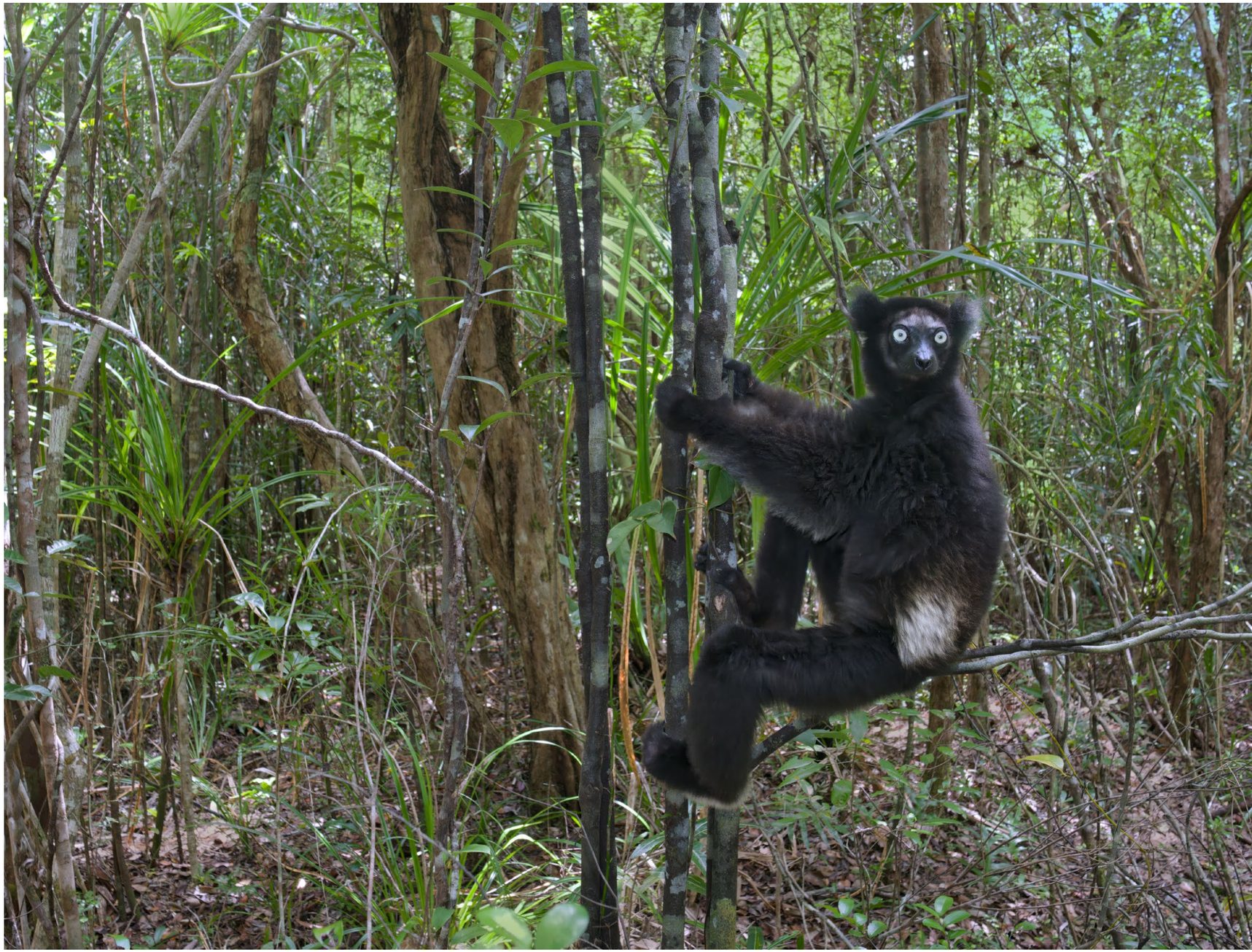
Next up is the rainforest of Mitsinjo Community Park. This beautiful nature reserve is not far from Andasibe-Mantadia National Park, which is much more popular and therefore more crowded. But both have similar animals for great photography. You can visit Mitsinjo Community Park either day or night, giving you two very distinct experiences. Walking the trails in the day, you can see several species of reptiles, including frogs, chameleons, and geckos. At night, you might see the nocturnal primates, like the fat-tailed dwarf lemur.

Finally, after a 1.5-hour boat ride through the Canal des Pangalanes, the adventure ends along the shores of the stunning Lake Ampitabe. Home to the indri and black-and-white ruffed lemur (both critically endangered), blue-backed reed frog, giant hog-nosed snake, and the otherworldly aye-aye, Lake Ampitabe has several lemur species, but it's also home to the critically endangered *Humbertiodendron saboureaui* tree.

Madagascar is often referred to as the "Land that time forgot," but with so many unique subjects, forgetting Madagascar seems utterly impossible.

---

*See more of **Daniel J. Cox**'s work at www.naturalexposures.com.*



Palmarium Reserve, Madagascar The critically endangered indri is one of the largest living lemurs and is the most vocal of the species. Listening to their haunting whale-like sounds reverberating throughout the forest as the sun begins to set is truly one of nature's most thrilling evening experiences.



Just Poking Around

WORDS AND IMAGE BY PETER MATHER

THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN entirely by accident. In 2019, I spent the late winter and early spring on Alaska's North Slope photographing a story on wolverines. A feature of the story was how wolverines require snow caves or snow holes that they dig to survive.

I was working with a team of biologists trying to set up a motion-activated camera trap within these snow holes. One day, I was flying in a small ski plane looking for wolverines when we followed wolverine tracks to a series of holes in a frozen river. I set up my camera in one of the snow holes, planning to pick it up a week later.

When we returned, it looked like a hurricane had come through the site. It wasn't exactly a hurricane, but rather a grizzly bear that must have recently emerged from a den. I was very disappointed when I dug out my camera and discovered that I had no wolverine photos — only a photo of a grizzly bear.

---

*See more of **Peter Mather**'s work at www.petermather.com.*

wild eye

A LENS ON THE UNTAMED WORLD

wildeyemagazine.com