

Issue 3 2020

The Wild Lens

magazine for photographers

Roy Toft

The
Bird

Portfolios

Wildlife

Photographer
of the Year
Contest



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- ABUNDANT WILDLIFE IN THE KALAHARI DESERT, SOUTH AFRICA AND BOTSWANA
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Pallas's cat, Tibetan high plateau. Photo: © Staffan Widstrand

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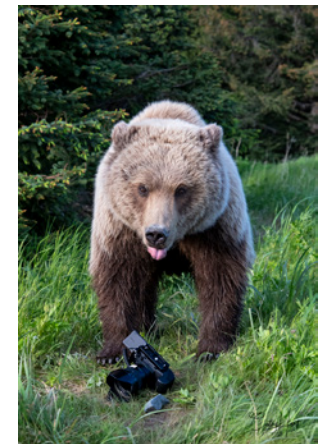
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Roy Toft

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Publisher's Note

"Earth has no sorrow that earth cannot heal."
—John Muir



The global pandemic has given us all a lot of time to reflect on ourselves and our connections with wildlife. As humans spend time finger-pointing about which country is to blame, which nation has been impacted the most, wildlife seems to be making a resurgence. For centuries, humans have pushed wildlife into smaller and smaller corners of the planet. But now, with billions in isolation and city streets emptied, nature is pushing back. *"Wild boar have descended onto the streets of Barcelona. Mountain goats have overtaken a town in Wales. Whales are chugging into Mediterranean shipping lanes. And turtles are finally getting some peace."* (Terrence McCoy, Washington Post). All it took was keeping humans on lockdown.

In this issue, read about Roy Toft's incredible harpy eagle journey, photographing an arboreal apex predator from a 90-foot platform in the Amazon, (We will be featuring videos of this incredible experience on the www.thewildlensmagazine.com website). View dazzling bird portfolios and photos from names like Peter Veryser, Tom Forsterling, Erisvaldo Almeida, James Overesch, Triknash Sharma, Ranjan Ramchandani, Arindam Saha, Suketukumar Purohit, Partha Chakraborty, and Dr. N. K. Pandey. Our conservation editor, Lori Lundin, tells a compelling story of elephant rescue from Sheldrick Wildlife Trust and also gives her perspective about the resurgence of wildlife in these uncharted times. Graeme Green talks about his New Big 5, an initiative to change the original Big 5, based on hunting, to a more positive approach.

As we all slowly recover, here's hoping we will keep living more simply and sustainably and give our wildlife a chance.

Michelle Liles
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A harpy eagle is captured in mid-flight, its wings fully extended. The bird's plumage is a mix of dark brown and white, with a prominent white patch on its chest. The background is a dense, green forest canopy, rendered with a motion blur effect that suggests the eagle is moving quickly through the air. The overall scene is dynamic and emphasizes the power and grace of the bird.

ninety feet up

Perched high in the forest canopy of the Amazon,
world-renowned wildlife photographer Roy Toft photographs the majestic harpy eagle

STORY BY MICHELLE LILES



For eight days, in a tiny blind, perched 90 feet in the air and strapped in with a harness, Roy Toft chronicled harpy eagles behavior. Spending 12 hours a day in the blind, Roy was able to observe one of the largest, rarest eagles in the world. Weighing up to 20 pounds and holding the title of the top arboreal apex predator in the Amazon rainforest, harpy eagles usually inhabit tropical lowland rainforests in the upper (emergent) canopy layer. Destruction of its natural habitat has caused it to vanish from many parts of its former range, and it is nearly extirpated in Central America. In Brazil, the harpy eagle is also known as a royal-hawk.

Roy saw harpy eagle parents take off to hunt, bringing back a Tamandua (arboreal anteater). The parents will stay with a chick up to two years to teach them to hunt and fly. Using equipment like a full frame DSLR camera, a 600 mm lens, sometimes with a 1.4 or 2X extender, a 100-400 lens for flight shots, Roy captured the images you see here.

For more information about viewing or photographing harpy eagles go to www.toftphotosafaris.com.



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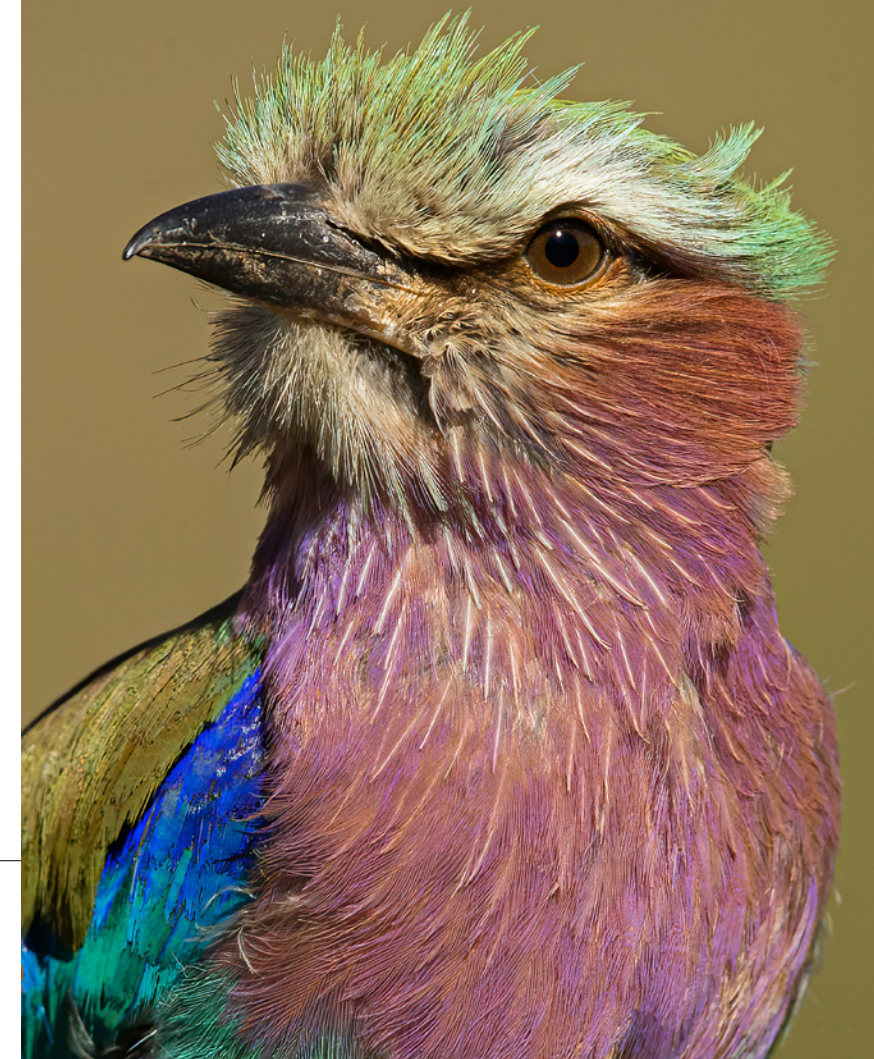
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the bird portfolios

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Erisvaldo Almeida



Left to right from top: agami heron, great egret, jabiru, Cocoi heron

Tom Forsterling



Left to right from top left: Eastern towhee, resplendent quetzal, great gey owl, red-headed barbet, slaty flowerpiercer

Peter Veryser



King and gentoo penguins

James Overesch



Snowy owls

Partha Chakraborty



Mottled wood owl

Arindam Saha



Baya weavers

Suketukumar Purohit



Peregrine falcon with yellow-footed green pigeon kill

Triknash Sharma

Dr. N. K. Pandey



Kingfisher

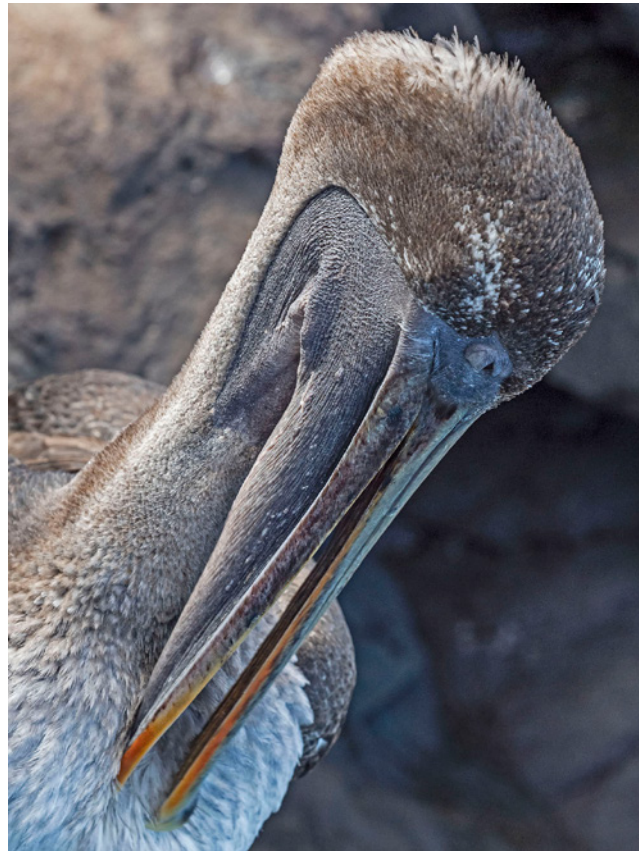


Indian peafowl, spotted owlet





Ranjan Ramchandani



Left top to bottom: brown pelican, vampire finch, lava heron. Right top to bottom: cactus finch, Nazca booby, blue-footed booby



Through the Eyes of an Orphan

The Urgent Effort to Save a Species

By Lori Lundin

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JACK RICE

It is a stunning sight. Infant elephants being bottle-fed by surrogate human parents, eyes glazed as milk drips down the sides of their wrinkled grey mouths. Breathtaking and maddening. They are being raised by the **Sheldrick Wildlife Trust Orphan Project** in Kenya, the heartbreaking result of a dark criminal underworld that profits from the poached ivory tusks of their murdered mothers.

“I wish to god this place didn’t need to exist.” My friend, Jack Rice, a criminal defense attorney and all-around warrior for justice, recently spent some time in Kenya volunteering with *Lawyers Without Borders*, helping train prosecutors working to get poachers convicted. Before returning home, he visited Sheldrick’s Nairobi facility to bear witness to what has been left behind from these crimes. “You know, I have children. I remember looking into the eyes of my own babies. The expressions as they were being fed. The similarity was uncanny.”

Crimes Of Inhumanity

The numbers are unfathomable. In 1930, about 10 million elephants roamed the continent of Africa. By 1970 there were just over one million. There are now just 415,000 remaining. Human poaching is the biggest threat to the survival of this species. Rice explains that throughout Kenya and East Africa, poachers target the animals in reserves where wildlife is legally protected. With inadequate resources, it is not possible to cover and patrol every single kilometer. “The problem that Kenya as a country is facing right now is one of corruption because organized criminal elements and terrorist groups are using poaching as a funding mechanism to run their operations,” he says. “But they can’t do it by themselves, so they recruit from the inside. Traffickers look for Kenyan officials to help them move ivory across the country to be distributed internationally. The Kenyan government understands this is unsustainable.”

“The government recognizes the importance of living elephants to their economy. But at the rate of this decline, they could disappear in our lifetimes.” Tourism makes up about 15 to 20 percent of Kenya’s GDP.

African elephants are also a keystone species, meaning they are a vital part of an entire ecosystem of flora and fauna. Their movements through vast areas of forest and grassland create trails and waterholes for other smaller species to co-exist, while the seeds from their dung generate new growth. Without them, the entire system would look very different. Sheldrick and other rescue organizations across the continent of Africa are waging an urgent battle to save them. When the staff at Sheldrick are alerted to an orphaned elephant sighting, an immediate race begins to locate the young calf in mostly remote areas of vast wilderness. A calf will succumb to predation or dehydration quickly without his or her mother.

Teams arrive on the scene by helicopter, equipped with infant elephant formula, medical supplies, and a stretcher to stabilize and transport them out as quickly as possible. Such was the case with a 15-month old bull calf named Roho who was spotted by air patrols.

“I was told he was found in the western part of Kenya, in Tsavo West National Park standing next to the body of his mother, the likely victim of suspected poachers. Her face was cut open to take her ivory tusks. The only reason this little elephant is still alive is because Sheldrick was there,” says Rice.

Elephants are deeply emotional animals with intelligent minds and keen memory who form lifelong bonds, especially between a mother and child. “We can only imagine what that young elephant may have witnessed,” says Rice. Sheldrick staffers say that in their 50 years of rescuing and raising orphaned elephants, they have seen clear indications of post-traumatic stress, sometimes lasting many years.



In the wild, the birth of a calf is celebrated by the herd with thunderous trumpeting and outward exuberance. Reunions are also filled with drama, exuberance and entwining trunks. Elephants experience anger, compassion and grief. They comfort their sick and weep at the death of a loved one. In a clear sign of thoughtful intent, elephants will work collaboratively to collect leaves and twigs to cover the body and have been witnessed returning to the site years later, spending days caressing bones of the deceased.

Long Term Relationship

Highlighting the complex lives of wild elephants helps understand what it takes to make these orphans whole again. In a life cycle that closely mirrors our own, the road to returning to one day living among their own takes years of unconditional love, encouragement, affection, and learning the ways

of elephant society and survival. All skills and behaviors they would have received from their mother and extended family herd. To provide the maximum level of comfort and familial bond, their human keepers will sleep beside an orphan at night offering reassurance and easing loneliness.

Elephants are said to be born with genetic memory. As the orphans are gradually weaned and integrated into groups of older orphans, keepers will also spend long days walking with them in the bush, in hopes of triggering natural wild instincts. Bonds are created as friendships form, with older orphans guiding and mentoring them toward becoming more independent.

“I could clearly see how the older orphans would protect the younger ones, defending them from some who might be aggressive, instinctively looking out for the little ones. Some seemed to take on the role of surrogate mothers, clearly innate and amazing to see. You really see these relationships deepening, the intelligence of working collectively, communication, touching and playing. The connection was so obvious,” says Rice. It can take up to 12 years for an orphan to gain the confidence to feel comfortable staying in the wild permanently. The hope is for them to ultimately breed and repopulate.

Reason For Hope

Some rescued orphans have long-term injuries that make them vulnerable to living completely in the wild. Sheldrick has specifically set aside areas that are fully protected so that they may lead lives that feel free. Many orphans do return to their roots to live among their own in wild herds, some of which include other survivors. As of this writing, Sheldrick knows of at least 36 elephant calves born in the wild to former orphans living in the wild. They know this only because these new mothers chose to come back to share the joy of their new offspring with the humans who raised them. Sheldrick officials feel certain there are many more out there that have been fathered by male orphans who have gone on to mate with wild females.

Sheldrick: “All are protected by our Anti-Poaching and Aerial Surveillance Projects, carried out in partnership with the Kenya Wildlife Service and funded by our global supporters.”



Final Note

There are rare moments in life when you wish time could stand still. When you savor the feeling of immense joy and contentment. Mine have been those few spent in the company of wild African elephants. The crucial work of Sheldrick Wildlife Trust is living proof of the impact that saving one orphaned calf can have on the future of these glorious creatures.

Visit sheldrickwildlifetrust.org to find out more about their heroic work with orphaned elephants and rhinos and the critical work necessary to protect their habitat.

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THE NEW BIG 5

Photos by Graeme Green | Interview by Michelle Liles

Gentoo penguin, Antarctica

The New Big 5 is an international initiative that aims to do away with the old Big 5 of wildlife – based on the toughest animals to shoot and kill – and create a new selection based on photography, not hunting. The New Big 5 project is supported by more than 100 of the world’s leading photographers, wildlife organisations and conservationists. The organization is asking people around the world to vote for the five animals they want to be included in the New Big 5 of wildlife photography. We had the opportunity to interview the founder of The New Big 5, Graeme Green.

How did you get the concept of changing the original Big 5, based on hunting, to The New Big 5, based on the protection and conservation of wildlife?

I had the original idea seven or eight years ago, on assignment in Botswana, for a Big 5 of wildlife photography instead of hunting—shooting with a camera, not a gun. But I’ve developed the project over time. I kept thinking about how trophy hunting is either meaningless or offensive to most people now. The original Big 5 was about the five animals that colonial-era hunters in Africa found most difficult to shoot and kill, which is an idea that belongs to the past. On the other hand, wildlife photography is more popular and

relevant than ever today. Photography’s a great way to celebrate wildlife. Nothing has to be killed. It’s a really powerful tool to help protect wildlife. A Big 5 of wildlife photography was something I thought should exist. But I wanted to use the idea in a project to get people thinking and talking about wildlife, and highlight the dangers many animals face around the world, from cheetahs, lions, and giraffes to little-known species of frogs, birds, spiders... A million species of animals and plants face extinction, each one too valuable to lose.

What are your goals with The New Big 5 pertaining to conservation and protection of wildlife?

I’ve been traveling the world as a photographer and journalist for 15 years. Over that time, I’ve become more connected to wildlife and the natural world, and more aware of the threats many species are facing. Our planet is a much better place with these animals than without them. I wanted to do something to help. My focus on the project at the moment is raising awareness. With all the podcasts, interviews, and articles we’ve got on the New Big 5 website, we’re looking not just at the problems, like habitat loss or the illegal wildlife trade, but also solutions people are coming

up with. There are some incredible, creative ideas being implemented to help protect wildlife. We’ve worked with many charities on the website, including Save The Elephants, Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund, Save Wild Orangutans, and Polar Bears International. If people want to make a donation or get involved with a particular cause, they’ll find ways to help on the website. I also plan to use the New Big 5 project to raise some money for various wildlife charities, further down the line.

Some big-name photographers are involved in the Big 5 project. How did you garner their respective involvement?

I was talking to Nat Geo photojournalist Ami Vitale last year about my idea. She liked it and encouraged me to go ahead. Since then, I have spent time over the last nine months contacting people. Once I managed to find them and get in touch, people were usually happy to help. It’s such a simple idea: to create a New Big 5 of wildlife photography and to use the idea to focus attention on the need to protect the world’s wildlife. So many photographers care about protecting the natural world. They hear the idea

and immediately get it. Dr. Jane Goodall did a great interview for the website and has helped spread the word. The founder of Save The Elephants, Iain Douglas-Hamilton, did a great podcast. So many amazing photographers have done interviews, podcasts and got involved, people like Steve McCurry, Nick Brandt, Thomas D. Mangelsen, Steve Winter, Marina Cano, Bertie Gregory, Daisy Gilardini. One thing I’m proud of is that the project is international, with photographers from the U.K., U.S., Peru, France, India, Kenya, Mexico and China. It’s taken a lot of time and the project hasn’t had any funding at all, so I won’t lie—it has been incredibly tough work.

Will there be a formal announcement of The New Big 5?

I hope so. We’ll be announcing the results of the international vote in November. I plan to arrange a big event. But it all depends on whether it’s safe by then to get large crowds of people together in one room, or whether COVID-19 means we still need to stay apart.

Whatever happens, we’ll be getting the word out to people about which five animals made the New Big 5.



Gelada monkey, Simien Mountains, Ethiopia



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International Judging Panel

Julio Hardy, *FotoNostrum*
Roy Toft, *Toft Photo Safaris*
John Isaac, *former United Nations photographer*
Kurt Bertels, *FiveZero Safaris*
Ranjan Ramchandani, *African/Asia Editor, The Wild Lens Magazine*
Michelle Liles, *Publisher, The Wild Lens Magazine*

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PHOTO COURTESY OF SHISHIR KUMAR JAIN



LOCKDOWN SILVER LINING

BY LORI LUNDIN

PHOTO BY DHEERAJ MALI

The global pandemic has taken thousands of lives, but it has also given something back, at least temporarily.

The irony of a deadly coronavirus transmitted to humans from trafficked wildlife has not been lost on the natural world. Nor has what happened with empty streets, skies and waterways. Our lockdowns cleared the way for the animals here on planet earth to spread out from what have been increasingly-shrinking wild spaces.

It has been one heck of a wakeup call. The question is, will we go back to “normal” or hear the call to co-exist more and dominate less?

Here's a list of examples from around the world:

- Jackals descending into downtown Tel Aviv
- Record sea turtle hatchlings on empty beaches of Thailand, India and Brazil
- A fox family taking up residence in Toronto, Canada
- A pair of Sika deer at the door front of a restaurant in Nara, Japan
- Dolphins swimming in the port of Cagliari in Sardinia, Italy and in one of the world's busiest marine routes, the Bosphorus in Istanbul
- Cougars wandering the streets of Santiago, Chile
- Lions napping on an empty road normally packed with cars of tourists in South Africa's Kruger National Park
- Wild boar snooping around towns across Europe
- A species of peacock on the streets of Mumbai
- Tens of thousands of flamingos converging in Mumbai, India
- Wild donkeys hanging out at an ATM machine in Allahabad, India
- Clear blue skies and dramatically reduced levels of CO2
- A herd of buffalo strolling down a street in New Delhi
- Coyotes prowling about in the city of Chicago
- Mountain lions in a residential area of Boulder, Colorado
- A rare killer whale sighting in Indian Arm in Vancouver, British Columbia



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