

Issue 4 2020

# The Wild Lens

magazine for photographers

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Mukherjee

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Roy  
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Anil  
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Arindam  
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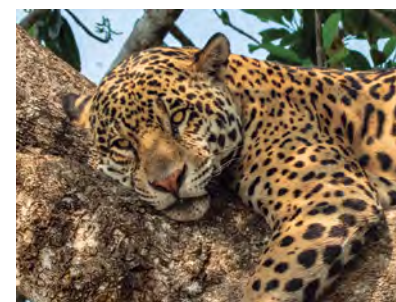
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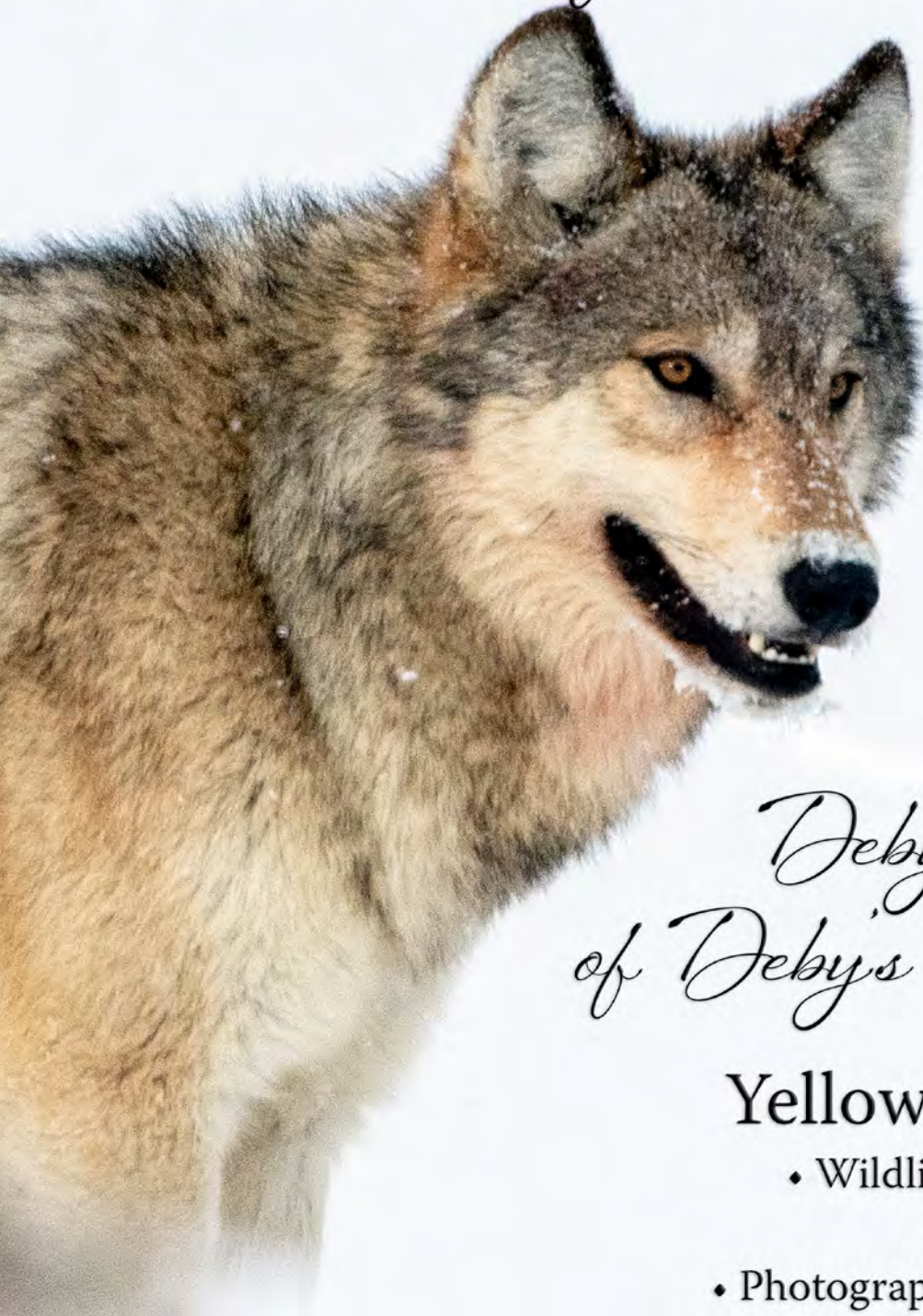
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## Yellowstone Area:

- Wildlife Photographer
- Writer
- Photography Workshop Guide
  - Wildlife Advocate
  - Videographer
- Vacation Rental Host

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**The Wild Lens**  
Issue 4 - 2020

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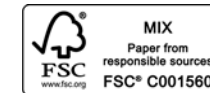
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Ranjan Ramchandani

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## **Publisher's Note**



PHOTO BY MICHELLE LILES

I recently made a photographic journey to Yellowstone National Park. The Wild Lens Conservation Editor Lori Lundin and I were guided by regular contributor Deby Dixon, who is extremely knowledgeable about wolf activity in YNP. We had a magnificent sighting, the Junction Butte wolf pack working together to take down a large bison, then feed their adorable pups. The wolves' focus, collaboration and ability to efficiently get the job done was very impressive. It got us thinking about human partnerships and how we can do so much better accomplishing our common goals collectively. How about a human pack?

We have another incredible and innovative issue with stunning underwater images by Dhritiman Mukherjee, fascinating Galapagos reptiles by Ranjan Ramchandani, a spread of gorgeous grizzly photos by Roy Toft with an accompanying article by the knowledgeable Alaska resident Dr. Grant Hilderbrand, extraterrestrial-looking macro flies by Arindam Saha, a big-name photographer portfolio for the New Big 5 and Fabiano Oliveira's mesmerizing jaguar portrait.

The Wild Lens Photography Contest is well under way, with many interesting and beautiful images being submitted through the website ([www.thewildlensmagazine.com/wildlife-photo-contest-2020](http://www.thewildlensmagazine.com/wildlife-photo-contest-2020)). The deadline is November 20, 2020. We hope to see your entry soon!

Michelle Liles  
[michelle@thewildlensmagazine.com](mailto:michelle@thewildlensmagazine.com)



wonder  
down  
under

Seal With Glacier, Antarctica  
PHOTO COURTESY OF DHRITIMAN MUKHERJEE | [RoundGlass.sustain](https://RoundGlass.sustain.com)



*Cormorant, Baja, Mexico*



*Pygmy seahorse, Manado, Indonesia*



*Hammer anemone with transparent shrimp, Philippines*



*Humpback whale and calf, Reunion Island*



*Dugong, Red Sea*



*American crocodile, Mexico | RoundGlass.sustain*



*Anaconda, Brazil | RoundGlass.sustain*



*Bull shark, Fiji*



PHOTO COURTESY OF DHRITIMAN MUKHERJEE | RoundGlass.sustain

*Are there any underwater species you hope to cover in the future?*

Many! I will spend some time working on the sperm whale as a species. I would like to dive and record the species of the Great Barrier Reef and any other spots around [Australia]. I also like to work in freshwater systems. For example, last winter I dove under the frozen rivers in Ladakh in search of life and found some small fish in the river under the thick ice. I even worked on the threatened golden masheer fish of the Ram Ganga river that flows

through Corbett National Park.

*Do you feel our oceans are in impending jeopardy?*

Yes, the ocean is the most neglected part of the Earth. The ecosystem has had direct and indirect damage. For example, you may have heard of many “save the tiger” campaigns. For a tiger to impact us there is probably a 50-step process whereas in the case of the ocean it is direct. How many people depend directly on the oceans? In India alone, we have a fishing community of almost 3.5 million persons depending on the oceans for their livelihoods. Apart from pollution such as plastic, oil spills and even noise, which interfere in the communication of underwater life, the biggest impact the oceans are having is of over-fishing and species reduction. There are legal sizes of fish that can be caught and consumed. This size restriction is there so that the fish can breed before the oceans deplete. No one is following this rule which is sad because of the high demand from fish factories for packaged meats and also the fish oil. The world needs to save habitat and ocean life as a whole and act in a balanced manner. We need to act now.

*Let's talk about the numerous awards you have received.*

I don't like talking about them but since you asked, I appreciate the awards that I have received. I did win quite a few which included Nature's Best, but the closest to my heart are the ones I got for conservation. For example, the RBS Earth Hero Award and the Vasundhara Mitra Awards, which I treasure.

*Where can people see your work?*

<http://www.dhritimanimages.com> | <https://round.glass/sustain/members/authordhritiman/>

DHRITIMAN MUKHERJEE is one of India's most respected wildlife and conservation photographers. He travels extensively to the world's most exotic locations in search of new adventure and the life forms that impact this planet and connect us with nature. He is an established author, with stories published in many national and international media outlets. Dhritiman is also the founder of the *Saevus* magazine in India, the ambassador for Roundglass and a Sony Explorer. Having won several national and international awards, he has also juried photo competitions, including the National Photography Awards hosted by the Government of India.

*When did you start photographing underwater?*

I started photography in 1997, wildlife in 2000. My first underwater dive with my camera was in the year 2012 and I have never looked back since.

*Did you go on a mission to photograph whales?*

Yes, I did. I went to Sri Lanka on one. I also joined a team of researchers in the Reunion Islands to photograph the humpbacks, and then took two trips to Norway for orca as well.

*The image of the dugong is fantastic. Tell me about it?*

This particular frame was made in Egypt, where we have very clear waters. It is a very interesting story. I had spent nine days diving in search of the dugong, with no luck. On my last day of that trip, I decided to get a guide to add two more eyes to the search. We were at the end of the dive and had started ascending when I felt something big behind me, and there it was: the dugong. I had only about 20 minutes of air left, and spent every last breath underwater, photographing this magnificent creature of the seas.

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INTERVIEW BY RANJAN RAMCHANDANI, WILD LENS ASIA/AFRICA EDITOR



Anil Thadani, Chairman of Symphony Asia Holdings, a private investment and investment management firm based in Singapore, is an ardent adventurer who uses his yacht to explore oceans and the far reaches of our beautiful planet. He has been to the Arctic three times and has successfully navigated the Northwest Passage from east to west and then from west to east, making his boat, Latitude, only the third boat to ever accomplish this in two consecutive years. Being a keen diver, he ends up in some of the most desirable dive spots around the globe.

Mr. Thadani believes that photographers can play an important role in reversing the damage humans have inflicted on the oceans through increasing public awareness and by using their work to support education and fundraising efforts.

These photos were taken in the Banda Sea, Misool and Raja Ampat of the Indonesia archipelago.



*Chromodoris nudibranch*



*Cuttle fish*



*Honeycomb moray eel*



*Wobbegong shark*



# Marine Iguanas

## *Icons of an Archipelago*

PHOTOS AND STORY BY RANJAN RAMCHANDANI

Found exclusively on the archipelago of the Galapagos, the marine iguana is a magnificent creature. This species is the only seagoing lizard known to man. Currently categorised as vulnerable, they are most intriguing because of their unique adaptability to environments, and hence their evolution.

Marine iguanas are herbivores and survive exclusively on algae found in mostly shallow waters. Their coexisting habits are rather interesting; males often fight over female 'harems' of iguanas when it comes to mating season, and are quite defensive of them. They aren't particularly social, however when temperatures drop, they are known to gather together and leverage their collective body heat to conserve energy.

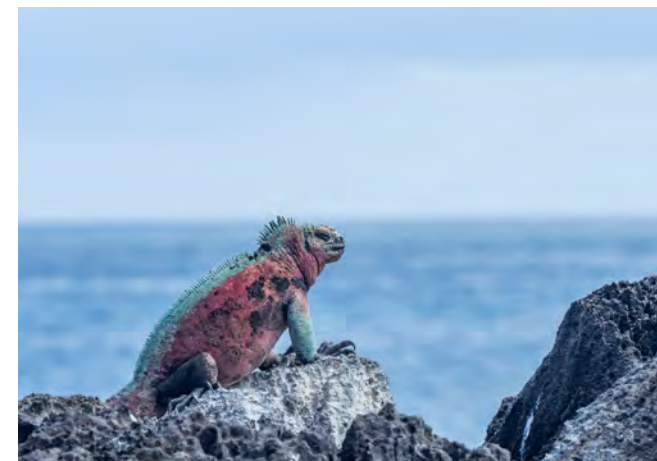
This creature's adaptability knows no bounds, as they even have what some call a "third eye". While this organ is not used for sight per se, its ability to detect changes in light in their surroundings and its placement atop their heads assists them in evading predators that may be swimming or flying overhead. Their physical skeletons are able to shrink by one fifth when food is scarce, returning seamlessly to their full size once their food source becomes more plentiful. When they emerge from the water onto land, these iguanas are able to clear their bodies of the sea salt that builds up from being in the ocean, letting it out as pockets of air in puffs - almost like sneezes.



Their primary nesting zones include one of the touristic areas of the Galapagos, on Isabela Island. Almost a decade ago, The Charles Darwin Foundation and World Wildlife Foundation joined the municipality of Isabela in extending their protected nesting zone from just the central area to cover all of it. There are informative signs to educate tourists and visible fencing to preserve the circle of life of this iguana species.

According to the WWF, species that may not have been originally native to the lands, such as dogs, cats and pigs, prey on these creatures. It can be inferred, then, that growing numbers of these introduced species could eventually become a threat to marine iguanas.

As with most animals found in the wild, the rapidly evolving climate crisis is an immediate threat to marine iguanas. Rising sea levels are just the beginning of their issues; the overall rise in temperature of the planet may interfere with their adaptability and homeostasis as well as their reproductive ability, and therefore may be more of a threat to their ultimate survival. The el niño effect is already known to dramatically decrease the population of iguanas in the Galapagos periodically.



Plastic pollution and oil spills are two other threats to their population; specifically micro-plastics, which often go undetected, can have negative ramifications on the health of these creatures and are often unknowingly overlooked because of their minuscule size. Oil spills, of course, have relatively straightforward consequences on all aquatic life, and there is no telling when one will occur near the Galapagos.

Given the magnificence of these creatures, it is easy to see why we must be proactive about their protection. They have survived millions of years, constantly evolving and adapting to their environment. It is likely that, without human interference, they could survive forever and so, even though we may enjoy observing them and vacationing on the islands around them, it is our job to ensure that these incredible marine iguanas are left untouched and unharmed by our actions. I am looking forward to going back to the islands as soon as I can to study this unique endemic species in greater detail to contribute towards the conservation of the species and its habitat.

(References: [www.retreatours.com](http://www.retreatours.com), [www.worldwildlife.org/species/marine-iguana](http://www.worldwildlife.org/species/marine-iguana))



# The New Big 5 Project

is an international initiative to create a New Big 5 of wildlife: the Big 5 of photography, not hunting.

This is a portfolio of renowned photographers who support the initiative and have offered their incredible images to support the cause.

You can vote for your choice on [www.thenewbig5.com](http://www.thenewbig5.com).



JEN GUYTON | Kalahari Meerkat, Northern Cape, South Africa



LATIKA NATH | Tigress, Ranthambore National Park, India



DAISY GILARDINI | Polar bears, Wapusk National Park, Manitoba, Canada



MARINA CANO | Infant elephant, Etosha National Park, Namibia



XI ZHINONG | Yunnan Snub-nosed Monkey, Yunnan province, China



SHANNON WILD | Verreaux's Sifaka, Berenty Reserve, Madagascar



PIPER MACKAY | Elephant, Tsavo, Kenya



NELIS WOLMARANS | Mountain Gorilla, Congo



GRAEME GREEN | Lion Brothers, Naboisho Conservancy, Kenya



MARCO GAIOTTI | Arctic Fox, Svalbard, Norway



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# Where Land and Sea Meet

Brown bears  
of the Katmai Coast  
by Dr. Grant Hilderbrand

*Dr. Grant Hilderbrand has researched brown bears throughout Alaska for more than 25 years. From 2015 to 2018, he and his colleagues studied the brown bears inhabiting the coast of Katmai National Park.*

PHOTOS COURTESY OF  
ROY TOFT



The coast of Katmai National Park is bounded by the towering volcanoes of the Aleutian Range and the crashing surf of the North Pacific Ocean. What lies between is a raw and rugged landscape of glaciers, spruce forest, rivers, sedge meadows, beach grass, and sand. It is both violent and serene. From the air and land, one is mesmerized by endless shades of green and blue. It is a hard place to get to and a place a part of your soul will never leave.

The fauna of the Katmai coast is diverse and abundant and resides in an ecosystem largely devoid of the direct impacts of humans. Eagles, ravens and gulls soar. Salmon and flounder swim. Seals, sea otter and wolves feast. But, it is the brown bears of the Katmai coast that attract most of the area's adventurers to watch and film the bears doing what they have done for centuries.

In 2014, Katmai National Park asked my colleagues and me to design a research project to assess the relationship between brown bears and the clams and mussels that reside in the nearshore environment. Prior work in the late 1990s indicated that these bivalves could be important nutritional resources for bears, particularly females with cubs as they meet the demands of producing milk and supporting the growth of their offspring.

Two significant risks were of interest to park managers. The first risk was the potential impacts of an oil spill on the

coast. While the likelihood of an oil spill is low, the effects could be catastrophic. Oil from the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill, which occurred several hundred miles away, did reach the Katmai Coast. By knowing where clams and mussels reside and where bears make the most use of them, the park would be able to prioritize their response to direct efforts to the most important areas. The second risk is the changing physical properties of the ocean waters throughout the North Pacific, specifically acidity and temperature. Changes in the condition of the water have the potential to adversely affect both clams and mussels, especially early life stages.

To tackle the questions posed by the park, we assembled a team with members from the National Park Service, U.S. Geological Survey, Washington State University, and the Alaska Sea Life Center with expertise in bear nutritional ecology, safe wildlife capture and handling, nearshore ecology, invertebrate sampling and environmental laboratory studies.

From 2015 to 2018, we handled and collared 36 individual bears, each equipped with a collar that recorded their location every 30 minutes throughout the summer and early fall. Each bear was originally captured in the spring, handled again in mid-summer, and then caught again in the fall when we permanently removed its collar. Every time we handled a bear, we weighed it, determined its percent body fat and collected a tube of blood and tuft of hair for dietary estimation.



In addition to capture work, biologists spent the full summer on the Katmai coast observing the foraging and activity patterns of the brown bears and collected samples of the food items bears were known to consume. During this same period, the team was conducting transect surveys along the coast to determine the location and density of clam and mussel beds. Some individual clams were collected and transferred to the lab where they could be measured, and researchers could investigate the impacts of varied water temperature, salinity, and pH on the bivalves.

Despite being a National Park characterized by a naturally functioning intact ecosystem subject to very little direct human impact, much has changed over the past 20 to 30 years. One significant change has been the successful recovery of sea otters to the Katmai Coast. Sea otters were greatly diminished throughout the Pacific coast of Alaska, largely due to the Russian fur harvest of past centuries. Sea otters have slowly recolonized their past range and increased roughly ten-fold on the Katmai coast since 1989. Due to their voracious appetites, sea otters are known to dramatically impact the density of their foods of choice such as clams and sea urchins. During the period of sea otter recovery on the Katmai Coast, the density of razor clams dropped by about 85%.

Another critical food resource for brown bears on the Katmai Coast is salmon. While salmon numbers tend to fluctuate over time, the running average from 2007 to 2017 is about half that observed from 1977 to 2006. Thus, two important food resources that brown bears historically used have declined substantially over the past several decades.

The individual bears we captured and followed were healthy and highly productive. On average, the adult females captured

weighed about 350 lbs. in the spring and over 500 lbs. in the fall. We also observed many litters of cubs, yearlings, and older offspring throughout our study. However, the number of bears seen during systematic observations dropped by more than half since 2000. Thus, fewer bears are being seen but the bears that are there appear to be in good shape.

Based on our assessment of diet from blood and hair samples, the proportion of salmon in the diet of bears dropped from about 60% in the mid-1990s to about 30% during our recent study. Thus, the reduction in the availability of salmon was replaced with vegetation in the diet. Clams and mussels did not contribute significantly to bear diet. While a handful of bears did swim to offshore islands and successfully hunt and kill both harbor seals and sea otter, this was not a significant resource for Katmai brown bears at the population level.

Brown bears will continue to roam the Katmai coast as part of the natural suite of species that comprise this raw and untamed ecosystem. Geologic processes that span millennia will continue to govern and shape the landscape. However, other physical processes such as melting ice, shifting climate patterns, and warming ocean waters are occurring on much more rapid scales. The biological processes that drive the fauna of the coast rely on physical properties such as air and ocean temperatures, acidification and ocean upwelling. Despite being “protected”, the ecosystem is changing and the brown bears are having to adapt to these changes. We will continue to monitor and try to understand the changes that are occurring on the Katmai coast and what these changes mean for the animals that call the coast home.

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MACRO IMAGES BY ARINDAM SAHA



MACRO PHOTOGRAPHY NOTES:

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Entries accepted August 20, -November 20, 2020 Midnight PST  
Details and entry form on [www.thewildlensmagazine.com](http://www.thewildlensmagazine.com)

### Winners

Winners announced in the January, 2021 issue and on our website  
Gift certificates from B&H Photo for winner and two honorable mentions in each category

Winning photos will be printed by Bay Photo Lab and exhibited at The Old Wrigley Building, Santa Cruz, California, U.S.A. in 2021

### 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

# A Day With the Greater Flamingos



STORY AND IMAGE BY SUMAN PAUL

Greater flamingos are a common visitor to Bhigwan Lake, India. Every year, at the beginning of winter, they start coming to the lake in thousands. The village of Kumbhargaoon has become a favourite spot for photographers and bird watchers.

On an early morning in April, I boarded a small motor boat with a local guide and moved towards a nearby island to see the flamingos. The island was submerged due to the monsoon rains. From a distance, the flamingos looked like white feathers in blue water. Luckily the sky was clear that morning, with good morning light.

A small colony of around 30 flamingos were wading across the shore in the shallows, with their beaks in the muddy water feeding on the algae.

Once I was sure they had accepted our presence, I slowly got into the water with my camera in hand and started to follow them, hiding behind the boat. This helped me to approach them without attracting their attention.

The scene was spectacular, as each of the flamingos were in different arrangements with their bodies, busily caring for their feathers and drying their wings.

I was in the waist-deep water for hours in order to photograph them closely. It was bit difficult to continuously balance the weight of the gear while trying to avoid contact with the water.

This is one of the images captured that day using a Nikon D500 with a Nikon 200-500 mm lens.



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