

Issue 1 2021

The wild lens

magazine for photographers

2020
PHOTO
CONTEST
WINNERS

Robin
Biswas

Lori
Lundin



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The Wild Lens
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Publisher's Note

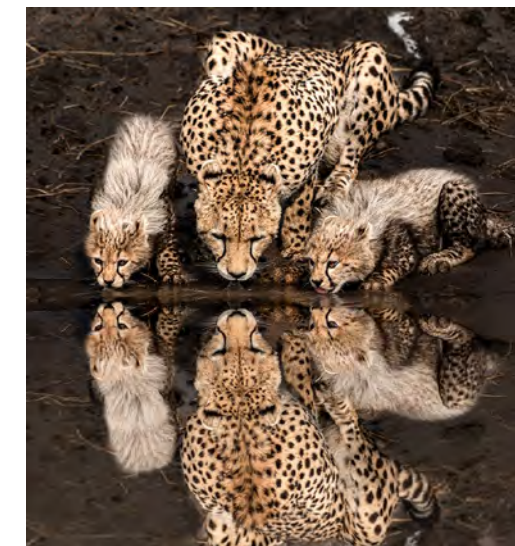


PHOTO BY ALYSSA THAKKER

Welcome to 2021! Hoping for a fresh start in so many ways. For us, as wildlife lovers and photographers, it will be a gift when we can safely cross international borders again to forests, beaches, oceans, savannas to pursue our passion of viewing and photographing the wildlife that we love.

In the meantime, we hope you can find some creative inspiration in the incredible winning images of our first annual *Wild Lens Magazine Photography Contest*. We are honored to have received entries from five continents and 27 countries in the categories of mammals, birds, underwater, landscape, macro and reptiles. Wildlife truly seems to create global unity. In the upcoming months we hope to feature more of our contest finalists, whose submissions impressed us so much.

Another recovery of 2021 will be from many global wildfires including the Dolan fire in Northern California. Our Conservation Editor, Lori Lundin, shares a compelling tale of Ventana Wildlife Society's efforts to rescue and restore the iconic California condor including miracle chick, "Iniko". Robin Biswas shares her extraordinary and rarely captured Ethiopian wolf images with us. There are only 400 breeding wolves left in the wild. Here's hoping we can bring some attention to the gorgeous species.

Congratulations to Thomas Vijayan, our 2020 Wildlife Photographer of the Year and Sun World safari winner!

Michelle Liles
michelle@thewildlensmagazine.com



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Ethiopian Wolves

A SPECIES ON THE BRINK

photos and story by Robin Biswas

With less than 400 breeding individuals left in the wild, the Ethiopian wolf is the world's most rare and endangered canid. Yet, unlike other, more vaunted African species under threat, the Ethiopian wolf has received but a fraction of the conservation attention it truly deserves, and remains a species that very few people know about.

Two extremely vulnerable sub-populations of the Ethiopian wolf are recognized, distributed in fragmented pockets on either side of the Great Rift Valley that separates them. While the northern sub-population is found in the Simien mountain range, its southern cousins, the group I shall be discussing, are found in the Bale Mountains further to the southeast.

Getting to Bale Mountains National Park involves a long, seven-hour drive from Ethiopia's capital city of Addis Ababa. The journey takes you through some of the most scenic countryside in Africa. One needs to head south on the A-7 highway all the way till Shashamane, where one can break for lunch. You thence proceed east to Dinsho, which is where you will enter the National Park.

Inside the park, the wolves can be found on the Sanetti Plateau. This high-altitude Afro-alpine grassland sits at a height of up to 4000 meters, so prepare well for the biting cold and thin air. Sometimes, if you are lucky, you may see a wolf right from the road. For a better photographic experience however, it helps to park your vehicle at a convenient spot off the road and trek deep into the plateau, looking for the wolves on foot.

A pack typically consists of the dominant lead-pair and their pups, and a few other subordinate adults who actively support in protecting, feeding and taking care of the youngsters. Uniquely, this species will seldom, if ever, hunt anything larger than a highland hare. Their prey of choice is the numerous species of Afro-alpine rodentia found here. They have a particular predilection for the big-headed mole rat, another endangered species that is endemic to these parts.



Adults will take turns to hunt and bring back food for the young pups, which is regurgitated in their presence. Most adults will be out hunting and bringing back food for the pups throughout the day. One adult is always stationed at the den site and will watch over the young with unwavering focus and care. It is entertaining to see the young cubs scrambling and jostling with each other, especially when the next meal has arrived.

My trip coincided with the months immediately after the pupping season, and I was able to locate and position myself (at a respectable and healthy distance) near an active den site. The use of hides or camouflage is recommended, as is that of a long focal length lens for stand-off shooting.



I would recommend a 600mm lens, and a 70–200mm option for closer encounters. Personally, I would advise against the use of remotely triggered cameras being placed near the den site. Any foreign, obtrusive, “weirdly-clicking” device, especially one that has the scent of man strongly imprinted on it, might force the pack to qualify the den as being imminently unsafe, and therefore warranting change.

Shooting, usually in a crouching or totally prone position, is at its best in the mornings, when one can observe the interactions of the pack as they rise and go about their daily routines of hunting and bringing back food for their young. During the afternoons, the light tends to be harsh. It can also get pretty windy up on the plateau, so due consideration must be paid to the stability of the camera and tripod.



The Ethiopian wolf is truly on the brink. Habitat loss, disease, overgrazing and hybridization with feral dogs are just some of the issues that severely threaten this species. Apart from the sterling efforts of a few privately-funded conservation NGOs such as the Ethiopian Wolf Conservation Programme (EWCP), there is little by way of government support and involvement.

A much more pronounced effort by a larger set of stakeholders needs to be made to protect this fragile ecosystem and the world’s rarest canid that calls it home!



Photo, previous page: An Ethiopian wolf in the beautiful ‘Everlasting Flower’ fields of the Senetti Plateau. *Above, right:* Ethiopian wolves feed almost exclusively on small rodents, birds, and eggs. *Middle:* Pups are extremely playful and boisterous, like those of most other species. *Bottom:* A mother and her pups basking in the warmth of the morning sun. Nights in the Bale Mountains will often be well below freezing.

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Wildlife Photographer of the Year

Mammals

Birds

Underwater

Landscape

Macro

Reptiles

PHOTO COURTESY OF SHISHIR KUMAR JAIN

MEET THE JUDGES



Ranjan Ramchandani

Mr. Ramchandani is a Singapore-based published photographer/author focusing on digital art, portraiture, street, landscape and wildlife photography. Ranjan calls himself a lifelong student of photography, who does not like being categorized in any one genre. He is a graduate of the New York Institute of Photography and, more recently, he has honed his skills through photography expeditions around the globe. Ranjan has been covered and published in various media in both India and overseas which include *Sanctuary Asia Publications*, *The Wild Lens* and *Outdoor Photographer*. Recently the WWF has also used his images in their campaigns. His work has been exhibited through a large number of shows. www.ranjanphotography.net, [www.ranjan.photography](mailto:ranjan@ranjan.photography), ranjan@ranjan.photography, Instagram: [@_ranjan_](https://www.instagram.com/_ranjan_) Twitter: [@RanjanFoto](https://twitter.com/RanjanFoto)



John Isaac

Mr. Isaac, a former United Nations photographer, is an Indian-born, award-winning photographer and author who has lived in NYC for most of his career. In addition to being known for his work as a photojournalist for the United Nations, he is also known for his independent freelance work photographing celebrities, including Audrey Hepburn and Michael Jackson. More recently, he has been working mainly on wildlife and travel photography. His UN work is brilliant and evokes tremendous emotion while viewing the astounding images. Go to his website for an incredible journey through his UN, cultural, portrait and landscape work. www.johnisaac.com, [@johnisaac](https://www.instagram.com/johnisaac).1943

Julio Hirsch-Hardy

Mr. Hardy is highly dedicated to the world of photographic art. He is a fine art and reportage photographer, with experience with set assignments (including shooting in Cuarón's film *Gravity*, Warner Brothers). Julio is currently the owner and director of FotoNostrum Gallery in Barcelona, and publisher of *FotoNostrum Magazine*. As a curator, Hardy organizes and curates the International Biennial of Fine Art and Documentary Photography (Madrid 2010, Buenos Aires 2012, Malaga 2014, Berlin 2016, Barcelona 2018). J.H. Hardy is also the managing director of The Worldwide Photography Gala Awards, dedicated to organizing juried photography awards, such as the Julia Margaret Cameron award for women, currently in its 15th edition and the Pol-lux award. www.fotonostrum.com, www.fotonostrummag.com, www.fotonostrumgallery.com

Kurt Bertels

With a background in nature conservation and decades of safari guiding experience, Mr. Bertels has a profound understanding of wildlife. His passion for photography and exploring the natural world in search of rarely seen species and natural spectacles has made him a specialist in creating innovative wildlife experiences. Kurt and his wife, Stephanie Tsentas Bertels own and operate FiveZero Safaris. An award-winning wildlife photographer including South African Wildlife Photographer of the Year and Windland Smith Rice he has been exhibited at the Smithsonian Museum. Kurt has a knack for translating complex photography concepts into simple terms. His instinct for wildlife behavior makes him a pro. www.fivezerosafaris.com [#kurtjaybertels](https://www.instagram.com/kurtjaybertels) [#fivezerosafaris](https://www.instagram.com/fivezerosafaris)



Roy Toft

Mr. Toft is an award-winning professional wildlife photographer and biologist whose images not only convey a sense of animal spirit but also grapple with changes to our natural world. He is co-author of the book, *Osa, Where the Rainforests Meets the Sea*, with ecologist Trond Larson. Dedicated to documenting the wild for future generations, Roy's photographs advance conservation efforts globally. He does this in part through his work with the International League of Conservation Photographers (ILCP), where he is a founding fellow. Toft Photo specializes in tours around the globe including Africa, Brazil, Patagonia, Alaska and Costa Rica to name a few. www.toftphoto.com [#toftphotosafaris](https://www.instagram.com/toftphotosafaris)



Michelle Liles

Ms. Liles has traveled to all seven continents including navigating the Drake Passage to Antarctica on a 54-foot sailboat, hiking the Himalayas at 13,000-foot elevation in search of snow leopard, scaling the cliffs of Singalila National Park in Mongolia searching for the elusive red panda, and trekking up rivers in her waders to photograph grizzlies. In 2018, Michelle merged her love of both publishing and wildlife photography in *The Wild Lens Magazine*. She is honored to be able to publish the magnificent photos of so many talented and esteemed

photographers. www.thewildlensmagazine.com, www.michellelilesphotography.com [#longlensforyoutoview2](https://www.instagram.com/longlensforyoutoview2)







1st PLACE-MAMMALS | Ben Cranke, United Kingdom, "The Battle", Botswana



2nd PLACE-MAMMALS | Triknash Sharma, India, "Dust Bath", Uttarakhand, India



3rd PLACE-MAMMALS | Avanka Fernando, Sri Lanka, "My Home", Nala National Park, Sri Lanka

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1st PLACE-BIRDS | Bence Mate, Hungary, "Eye to Eye", Monte Verde, Costa Rica



2nd PLACE-BIRDS | Tibor Kercz, Hungary, "Rainy Night", Opusztaszer, Hungary



3rd PLACE-BIRDS | Ben Cranke, United Kingdom, "Whiteout", South Georgia Island

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1st PLACE-UNDERWATER | Amos Nachoum, USA/Israel, "Facing Reality", Plano Island, Antarctica



2nd PLACE-UNDERWATER | Jodi Frediani, USA, "Curious Calf", Vava'u, Tonga



3rd PLACE-UNDERWATER | Amos Nachoum USA/Israel, "Family of Polar Bears Over My Head", Hudson Bay, Canada



1st PLACE-LANDSCAPE | Barry Feldman, Australia, "Early Morning Mob", Victoria, Australia



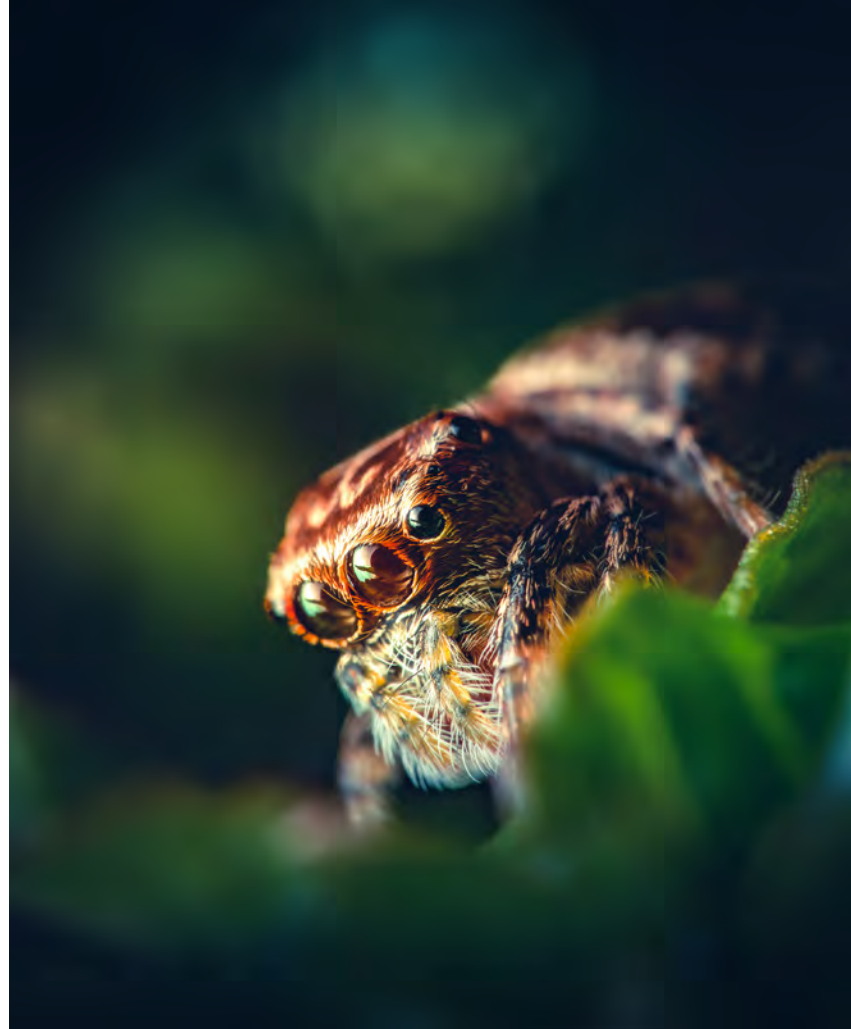
2nd PLACE-LANDSCAPE | Christine Garner, USA/St. Maarten, "*Shallows at 35,000 Feet*", Exumas, Bahamas



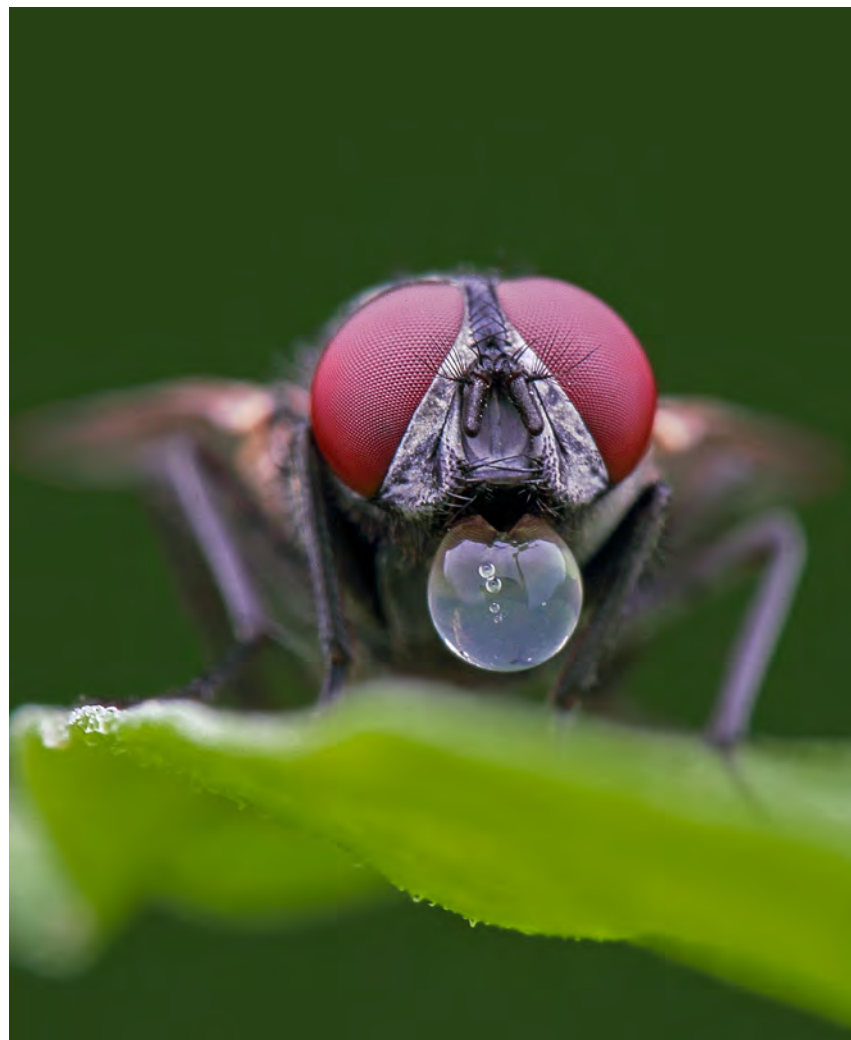
3rd PLACE-LANDSCAPE | Jason Speth, USA, "*Son Doong Cave*", Son Doong, Vietnam



1st PLACE-MACRO | Anirban Dutta, India, "*Drenched In Dew*", West Bengal, India



2nd PLACE-MACRO
Reynante Martinez
Philippines
"The Sniper"
Zambales, Philippines



3rd PLACE-MACRO
Arindam Saha
India
"Big Eyes"
West Bengal, India



1st PLACE-REPTILES | Brad Graf, USA, *"Senior Year Portrait"*, Galapagos, Ecuador

SCAVENGER HUNT

A Wildfire-Ravaged California Condor Sanctuary Presses On

STORY BY LORI LUNDIN



2nd PLACE-REPTILES | Dr. S.S. Suresh, India, "Forest Green Lizard", Trichur, India



3rd PLACE-REPTILES | Suman Paul, India, "Mr. Poser", Pune, India



Surviving condor chick, Iniko

The last year felt, at times, like the world was on fire. But it was more than just a metaphor across much of the Western United States which was literally burning. Out-of-control wildfires brought dramatic orange-red skylines and thick smoke that turned daylight into apocalyptic gray.

More than nine thousand fires burned throughout California in 2020. On August 19, one day after igniting, the so-called Dolan Fire moved in on the Ventana Wildlife Society's (VWS) Central Coast Condor Sanctuary. The property is just a mile north in wild and remote Big Sur, where ancient redwood forests meet chaparral, grassy meadows and sage-covered ocean bluffs.

Before going dark, its live "Condor Cam" captured the approaching flames in real-time. On August 20, fourth-month-old baby condor "Iniko" was moving about in the hollow cavity of a giant redwood tree where she was being raised by her wild parents. You could hear the fire crackling just outside the tree nest cavity opening. VWS Executive Director, Kelly Sorenson, in an interview with the *Salinas Californian*, spoke of the agonizing wait, "It looked like that chick was doomed. The way the flames were burning and everything, it was the hardest thing to watch. Not knowing, it was killing me," he said.

Photos courtesy of The Ventana Wildlife Society and Brian Caldwell

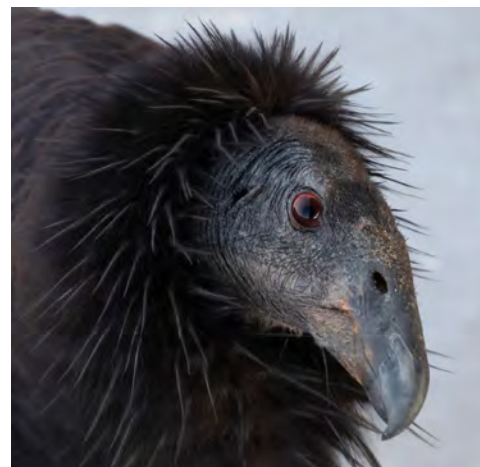


Condors return to trees burned in the Dolan Fire

On September 2, fire officials gave the okay for the VWS field crew to go into the charred area. Iniko, Nigerian for “born in troubled times” had survived. Alive and well, she was being cared for by her mother, Redwood Queen #190. Her father, Kingpin #167, was missing. Iniko was one of five nesting condor chicks in the fire zone. The team heroically rescued another chick from a cliff cavity nest that was in direct line of approaching flames. Kingpin is one of nine missing adult condors presumed dead along with two chicks that perished. The sanctuary’s condor release facility and its research center were destroyed.

Despite these devastating and painful losses, rebuilding is underway and the Condor Cam is back up and running. With Iniko back in sight, the VWS field team had growing concerns for her vulnerability. The young condor, who was now being raised by her mom, had been forced out of the nest and harassed by a territorial male. After observing her spending the night on the ground with an apparent leg injury, the decision was made to go back in and save her. She is now recovering at the Los Angeles Zoo and will be released back into the wild this year (2021) with a group of captive-bred condors.

California condors are North America’s largest bird species with a wingspan as much as ten feet wide. Once dominating the Western U.S. skies, these graceful gliders can soar with the wind flow for miles and miles. Their populations began a steady decline to extinction in the twentieth century. The threat: lead poisoning from tiny bullet fragments in the carcasses they feed on. In 1987, the last wild California condor was trapped and brought to a captive breeding facility where all 27 condors left in the world were being raised in a program run by the Los Angeles Zoo and the San Diego Wild Animal Park. In 1992, they began reintroducing condors into the wild. The VWS Condor Sanctuary has been releasing captive-bred condors since 1997, the year it purchased the 80-acre Big Sur property. The work continues to this day. There are now 90 free-flying condors soaring along California’s Central Coast and more than 300 range-wide. Sorenson says the devastating wildfire losses only deepen their determination. “2020 has just been a terrible year for condors and, as a result, we need to redouble our efforts to restore condors to the wild,” he said.



FUN FACTS ABOUT CONDORS:

- One of the longest-living bird species, with an average lifespan of about 60 years
- Monogamous, mate for life and breed only once every two years
- The skin on their heads and necks can change color to reflect mood and to communicate
- Can fly to altitudes of 4,600 meters (15,000 feet)
- A social species who shares food and spends time resting close together

For more information on the Ventana Wildlife Society or to assist in rebuilding efforts, visit: www.ventanaws.org

Editor’s Note: Keep an eye out in future issues for our in-depth look at conservation advocate efforts to get rid of lead-based ammunition which has caused a decline in condors and other species around the world.



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Dedicated to documenting the wild for future generations, Roy’s photographs advance conservation efforts globally. He does this in part through his work with the International League of Conservation Photographers (ILCP), where he is a founding fellow.

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