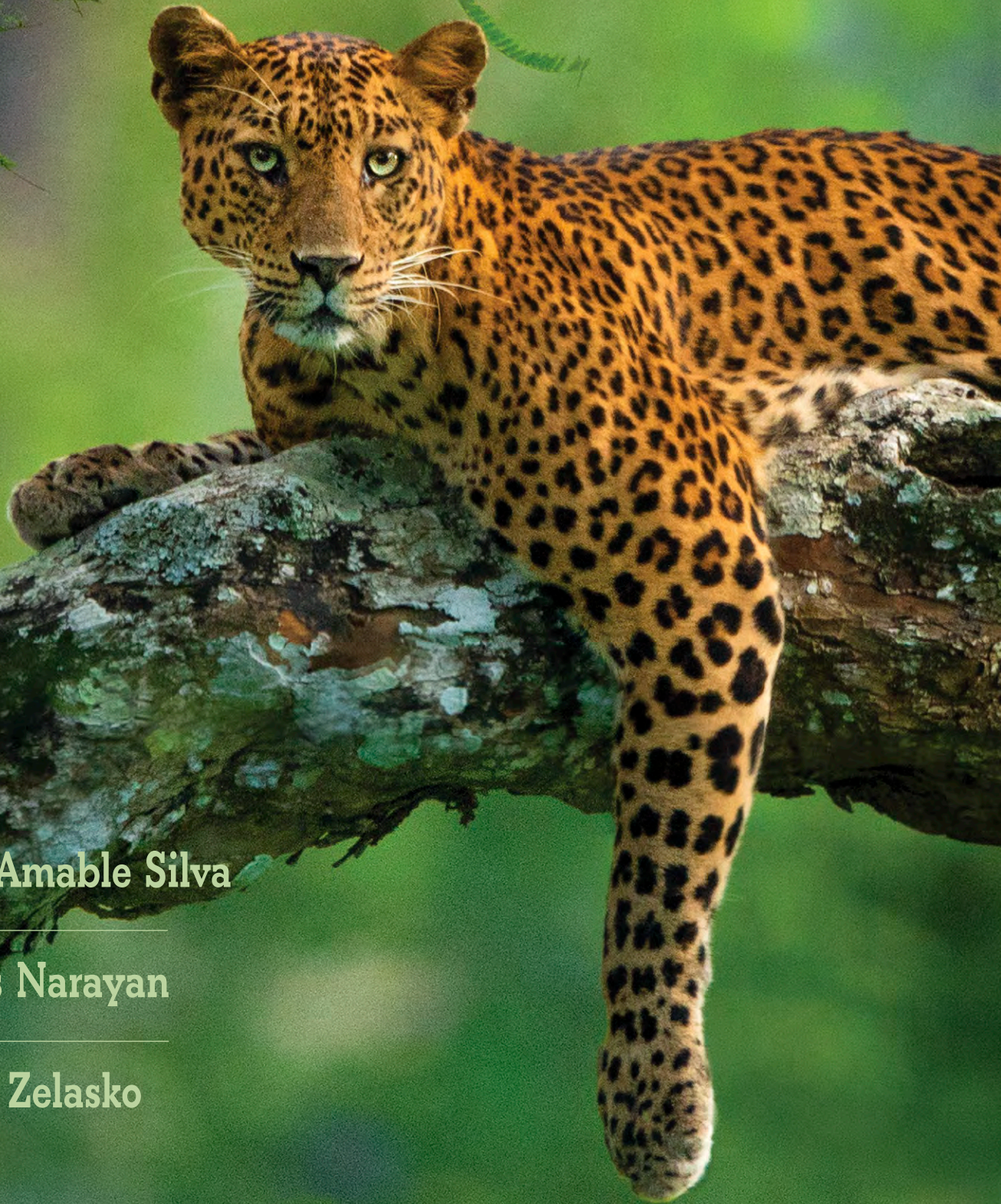


Issue 4 2023

the wild lens

magazine for photographers



Naun Amable Silva

Yashas Narayan

Sandy Zelasko

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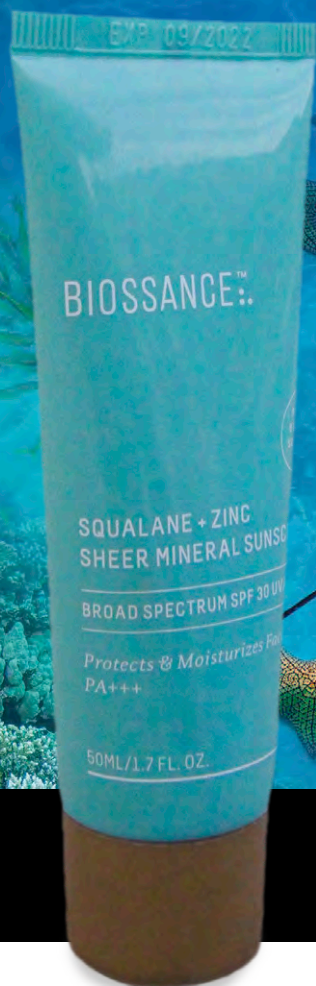


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Publisher's Note



PHOTO: DAVID THIBAUT, USA

We are now completing our fifth volume of *The Wild Lens Magazine*, and like any wildlife photography trip, it's been an incredible journey. We are so grateful to all of our subscribers; we can't do it without you. We also appreciate the exceptionally talented amateur and professional photographers who have contributed their work.

Going into volume six next year, in addition to our quarterly Photographer Feature, which often is a professional photographer, we will highlight an amateur photographer. The first feature will be of airline pilot David Thibault and his river-floating fishing journey through Moraine Creek, Alaska. After becoming a founding *Wild Lens* subscriber, Dave was inspired to up his photography game. If you would like to be considered for this new feature, send us an email.

In this issue, we have dazzling photos from both Naun Amable Silva of Untamed Expeditions and Photographer of the Quarter Yashas Narayan, with his work from Kabin National Park. Christine Cope Pence, PhD, and Sandy Zelasko elevate the species of greater prairie chicken and greater sage-grouse with their incredible action portfolio. Joseph Cooper showcases the beauty of familiar wildlife in his stellar images from North Carolina. Africa/Asia editor Ranjan Ramchandani continues to garner brilliant big cat images from his long stretches in eastern Africa and Mohit Ghatak shares his beautiful African bird portfolio.

Don't forget to enter our 2023 photo contest at www.thewildlensmagazine.com. Last year's Grand Prize winner, Adam Horvath, entered only one image but spent 75 days in the field to capture it. We would love for you to enter!

Michelle Liles
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Untamed Adventure

Images from
the wildlife portfolio of
Untamed Expeditions'
Naun Amable Silva





Hoatzin



Guanaco



Puma



Armadillo



Collpa chuncos



Copybara and giant cowbird



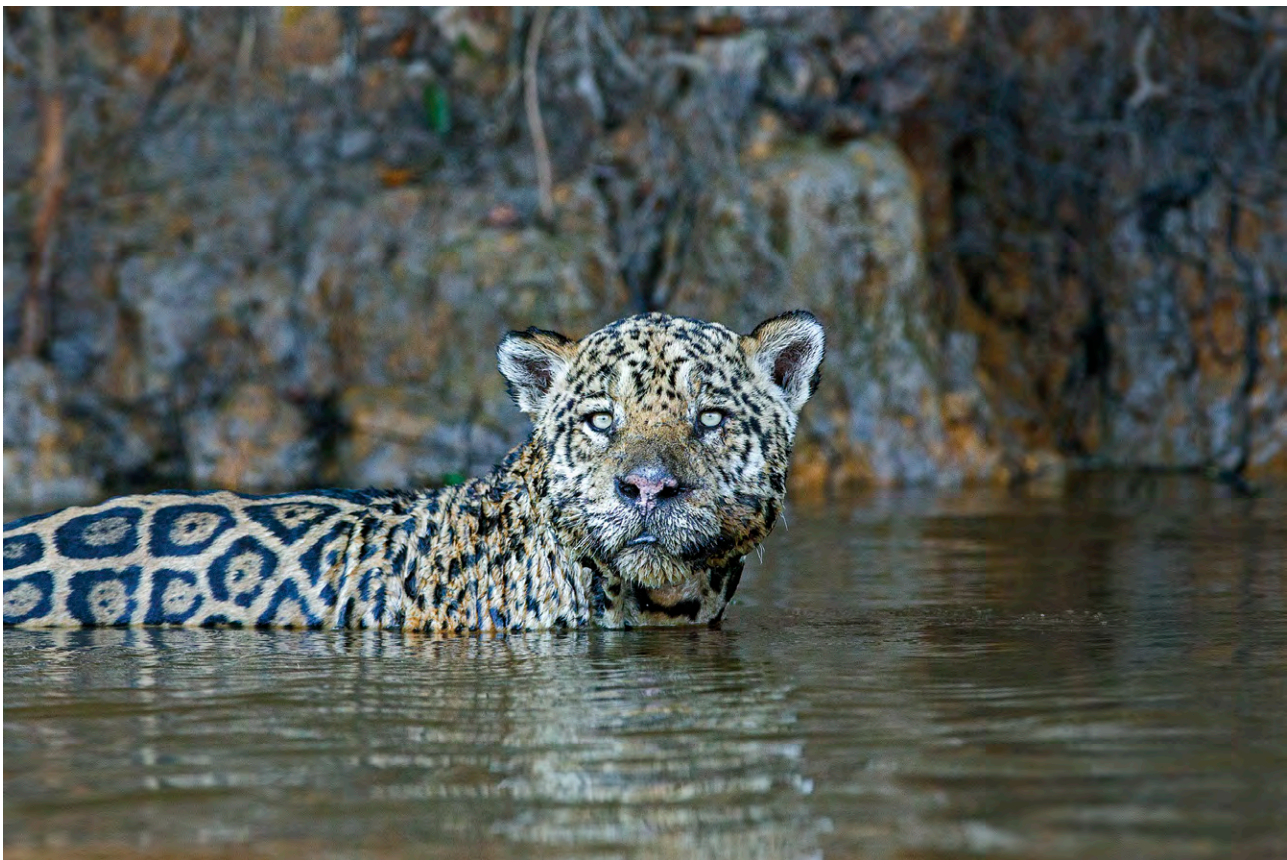
Pumas



Giant river otter



Barred antshrike



Jaguar



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Photos by Mohit Ghatak

Out of



AFRICA

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Black-crowned tchagra



White-bellied sunbird



Red waxbill



Crested barbet



Pied kingfishers





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PHOTOGRAPHER FEATURE

Yashas Narayan

Yashas Narayan is a professional photographer and well reputed guide who specialises in Asiatic wildlife, particularly in southern India. Born in Mysore Province, home to some of the most famous national parks in India, Yashas was exposed to jungles from a young age. This has allowed him to develop a keen understanding of animal behaviour and to cultivate his passion for wildlife photography.

Yashas specialises in tracking big cats and has spent the last few years documenting tigers, leopards and melanistic leopards in India. His astonishing portfolio of these magnificent predators has earned him publication on various media platforms.

Yashas is the first Indian photographer to have a Discovery Channel feature film produced about him, as a part of the 'Project Cat' campaign.

Instagram: @yashas Narayan

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REGAL THESIS

An appreciation of lions

Photos and story by
Ranjan Ramchandani



During my decades-long journey through the vast terrains of Africa and numerous corners of our world, few sights rival the commanding presence of a wild lion. These iconic animals, *Panthera leo*, are often heralded as the “Kings of the Jungle,” but their reign is increasingly under threat.

From the golden savannahs of the Serengeti to the grassy plains of South Africa, the tale of the lion is one of diminishing roars. In recent decades, lion populations have faced a decline of about 43%, with roughly 20,000 individuals remaining in the wild as of 2021. The primary culprits? Poaching, habitat loss and human-lion conflict.

Lions, once roaming diverse landscapes across the continent, now find themselves confined to fragmented pockets of land. Their territories are increasingly encroached upon by human settlements and agriculture, leading to direct conflicts as lions predate on livestock. Poaching, often driven by the illegal demand for lion bones and other body parts in traditional medicine and trophy hunting, exacerbates this decline. But it's not all grim. Grassroots conservation movements, dedicated reserves, and community-driven initiatives are fervently working to reverse this downward spiral. As a photographer, I want to do my job of capturing and sharing the true essence of these magnificent beasts to the best of my ability. I want to narrate a story that desperately needs to be heard – a call to action to save the majesty of the wild lion.





Prairie Dance: Two species in a shared battle for survival

Story by
Christine Cope-Pence, PhD
Photos by
Sandy Zelasko



Greater prairie chicken

On dawn mornings in April, across the sagebrush sea and prairie grasslands of the western United States, we sought out mating leks of two grouse species in decline. Both the greater sage-grouse and the greater prairie chicken are listed as “Near Threatened” on the Global IUCN Red List, giving urgency to our desire to document their fascinating mating activity.

Long before the sun rises, both birds follow similar patterns. The males and females fly into predetermined areas called leks and begin their vocal and physical courting activities. Males display a variety of skills to attract the females, occasionally resulting in copulation, after which the female flies away to nest. Most of the females will choose only one or two males for actual mating, leaving the rest of the males to demonstrate their skills to each other. A couple of hours after sunrise, all the birds fly away, leaving the lekking area to the other birds and animals, including meadowlarks, horned larks, burrowing owls, rabbits, pronghorn, coyotes, and even domestic cows. Each grouse species performs slightly differently on its lek. We chose to see the greater sage-grouse and the greater prairie chicken this year.

Finding accessible mating leks suitable for photography is challenging. More than 95% of the leks are on private lands in this part of the world and are not listed anywhere. Making connections with local offices of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM.gov) and US Fish and Wildlife (FWS.gov) is a good first step toward identifying locations and amenable landowners.

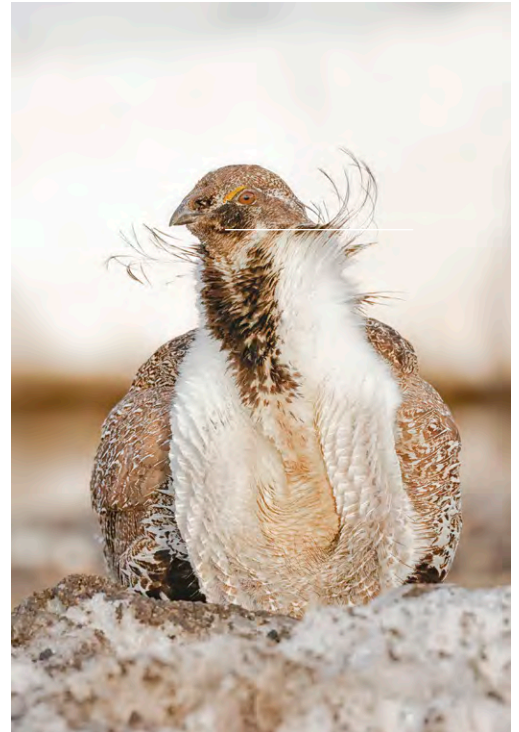
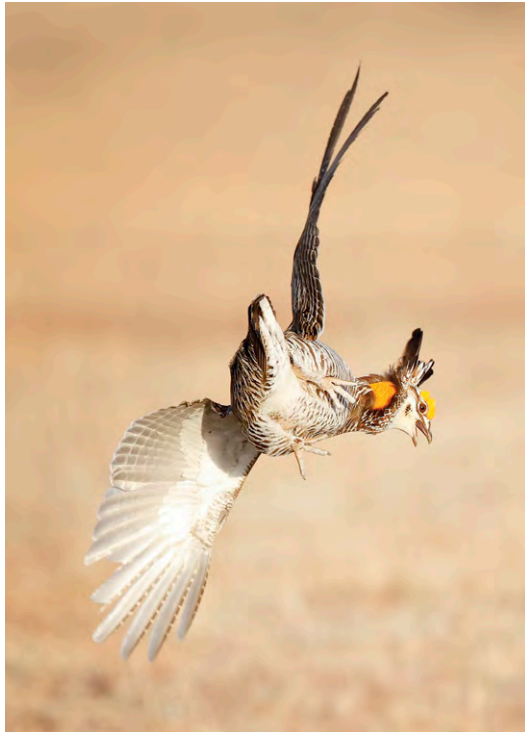
Often, these leks are located across barely accessible terrain, requiring a four-wheel drive vehicle with high clearance for passage. The leks will be open clearings with wide visibility for the birds to identify possible dangers. The greater sage-grouse lek will be covered in low sagebrush and the greater prairie chicken lek will be surrounded by taller prairie grasses.

A blind will be important for having the best photographic experience. This can be a portable tent blind, a fixed wooden blind, or even a vehicle with enough room for maneuvering through an open window. Keep in mind that the outside climatic conditions are likely to be cold, wet, windy and difficult for keeping the camera steady. Getting into place at least an hour before sunrise, we observe the action long before our cameras can capture the action. The morning cooing and bubbling sounds of the birds confirm that we have reached the lek and that the birds are there, already displaying for each other. As the sun rises, the lekking grounds take shape and, finally, the cameras can capture the frenzied mating activity of the grouse.

Both of these bird populations are in decline throughout most of the West and Midwest as a result of loss of suitable habitat. Human encroachment, over-grazing of cattle, invasive infestation of juniper and red cedar trees and grasses such as cheatgrass, climate change and wildfires all contribute to the disappearance of these birds. The health of the prairie and rangelands’ soil, water, native plants and wildlife is now central to US policy on sustainable conservation for survival as evidenced in the priority statements of the US Department of the Interior.



Formal and informal partnerships with other agencies and with landowners are continuing the essential efforts needed to save our natural resources in these areas. This commitment to public-private collaboration is progressing, but as we see in our travels, the damage done is significant and will take time and resources to overcome.

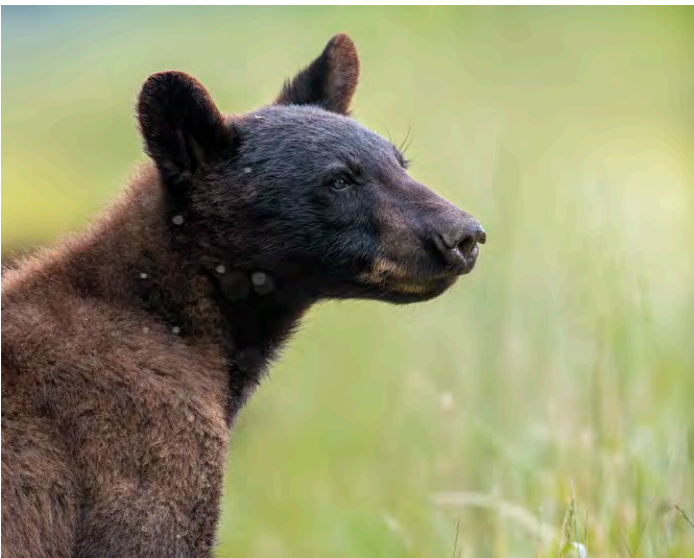


Greater sage-grouse

JOSEPH COOPER

“To see something new, I visited eastern North Carolina with its swamps and wild areas. There I found some enormous black bears, a mother raccoon and her kits, river otters and more barred owls than I have ever seen. An epic wildlife sighting was of two red wolves, who are critically endangered. I encourage photographers to go out and see new places.”





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