

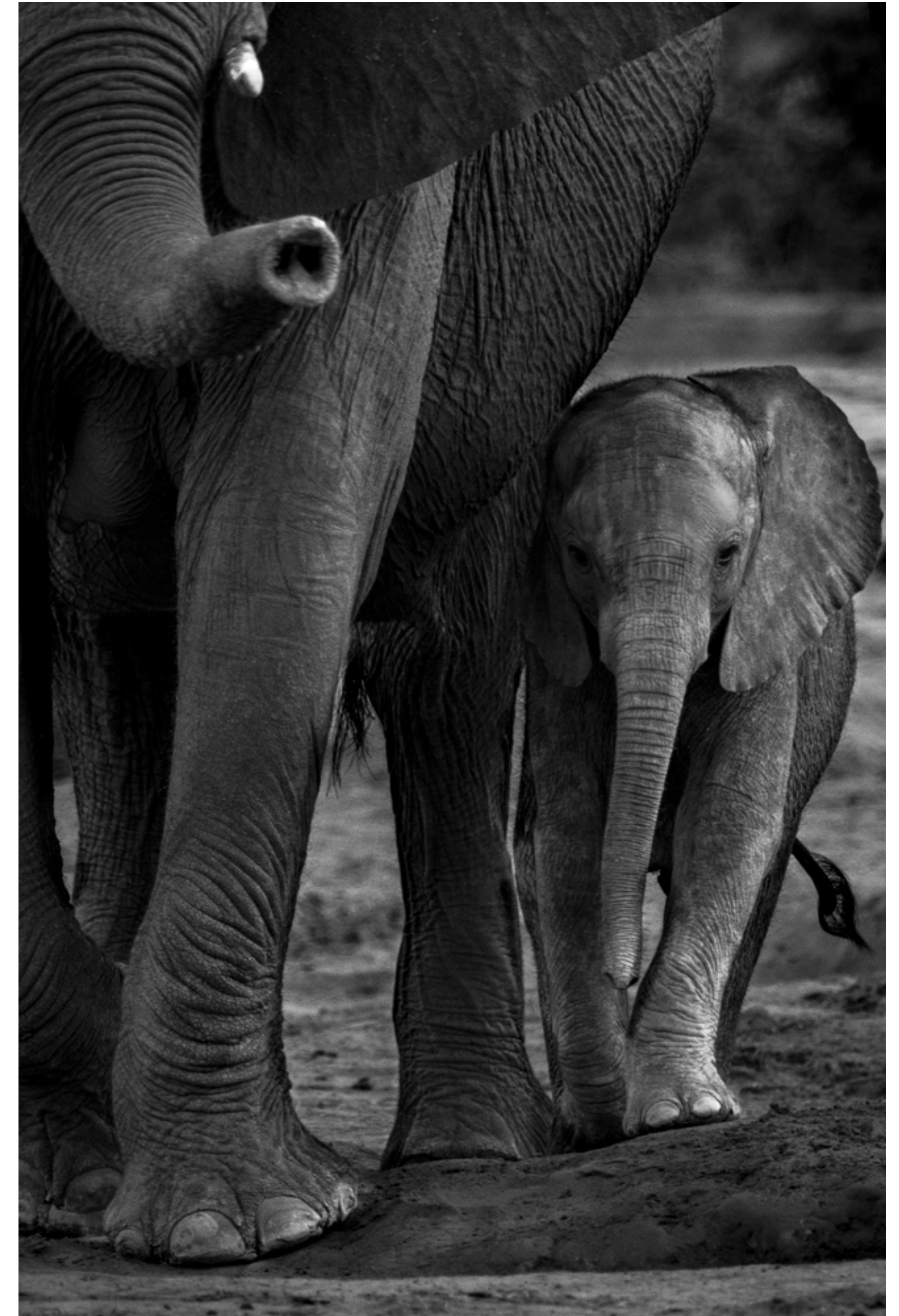
SURVIVORS

ANKIT KUMAR

Foreword by
Dereck and Beverly Joubert

To My Mother,

Thank you for being the reason why I take photographs at all,
for pushing me to do my best. This wouldn't be possible
without you.





FOREWORD

At the core of every good nature photographer is a deep love of the wild, its allure, its complexity, gritty or not, and its moving beauty. Ankit, like both of us, stands in awe of Nature and all it lends us. But as we lean into it, we discover that it is vulnerable - its landscapes, wild animals, air, water, and very soul threatened. Speaking out, in words or in imagery is urgent now. So when someone as passionate and talented as Ankit invests his creativity in being that voice, we all thank him. Take a moment to consider some of these awards - *The Youth Travel Photographer of the Year* award in 2016 and 2019 and in 2017, *The Asian Geographic Youth Photographer of the Year*, and in 2018 the *Nature's Best Photography Asia* honourable mentions he received at the *Smithsonian Museum* in Washington DC. Now take a look at his images or age!

Clearly there is talent here, and we particularly like his experiments that he has shared details of with us; of creating gigapixel images that involve stitching 600 to 1,000 photographs together to create precise, detailed landscape images. But the thread through the book, be it tigers, polar bears, orangutans, rhinos, lions, leopards, wild dogs, elephants, or mako sharks is clear - these animals are all survivors, for now, but without our help they will quite simply not make it. Some, like rhinos in Africa, are on an extinction timeline of months, not decades, with one being poached every 7 hours at least. When I was born, there were 450,000 lions and today those numbers hover around 20,000. Cheetahs have dipped below 8,000 in number and a surprise newcomer to this desperate list is the giraffe, being collected for its skin and hair in some weird myth about it curing ailments. Let me say it here: It doesn't!

Even safari hunters shoot giraffe and we have to ask who, what kind of person derives pleasure from killing a giraffe? An animal that Karen Blixen wrote of in *Out of Africa* as 'those delicately painted ladies dressed in mists and fineries.' The answer is probably that these are the kinds of people who just don't know. Ankit's voice (via his lens) adds to the understanding, the battle against ignorance where if you know something, you cannot un-know it. Haunting images of the eyes of animals, or children in India (where we know Ankit has photographed) tell so many stories: the compassion we must share, the empathy, trust, dignity we must afford to all of these things, the respect we must give ourselves for what we are capable of to be the best versions of ourselves.

There is an unfortunate terminology in photography, where we "take photographs" because it implies removing something - often dignity, or theft in its worse extreme - or just snapping off an image in front of you. In this case Ankit is giving something (to the Great Plains Foundation) and we prefer to think of it as "making a photograph" and certainly the images in this book are not snapped - they are worked at, considered in pain and in creativity, as much as Ankit has invested in 'us' and our collective goal to change the narrative around Extinctions and the role that we are playing in Climate Change that will affect us all. We hope that you enjoy your investment in his message.

Dereck & Beverly Joubert,
Award-winning filmmakers, *National Geographic Explorers*
and wildlife conservationists

INTRODUCTION

It was October 2015, and I was strapped in for my first helicopter ride across the African savanna. Taking off from Mwiba Wildlife Reserve in northern Tanzania, we were making our way north to Lake Natron and the active volcano, Ol Donyo Lengai, to witness the Lesser Flamingo in flight as well as the gorgeous colours of the soda lake. As we took off, our pilot spoke to another pilot, Roger Gower, who was taking off separately to patrol the area for poachers. Just a few months later, I learnt that Roger had tragically passed away. He was on a helicopter patrol when he spotted poachers with a bag full of ivory on the ground and as he investigated, was shot and hit. While he survived the crash, he succumbed to his injuries shortly after.

This was a tragic reminder of the daily realities in wildlife conservation in Africa. Various animals are under threat due to poachers, hunting for everything from tusks, horns, scales, skin and meat to supply to various consumers all over the world. Despite the valiant efforts of many brave and diligent anti-poaching people on the ground and in the air, it continues given the large sums of money involved.

Inspired and humbled by the efforts that Roger and thousands like him have put into saving the natural fauna across the world, I decided to create *Survivors* - a photobook of animals that are either endangered or under threat as a result of human actions. Whether it be habitat loss, hunting, or climate change, these animals must fight to survive - many are on the brink of extinction. I hope to share the importance of protecting these animals and encourage the reader to take action.

I am a seventeen year old photographer based out of Asia. I mostly photograph wildlife and landscapes, but have tried my hand at other genres, including underwater photography, astrophotography and street photography. It was for my 13th birthday that I'd finally got my own camera as a present from my parents. My mother is an amateur photographer and she introduced me to the world of photography. I am enamoured by the complexities and mechanics of cameras and believe that understanding the theory behind how cameras work is fundamental to appreciating the photographs they produce. I find the technical aspects of taking photos simply remarkable - from experimenting how best to utilise dual gain ISO to figuring out hyperfocal distances to get the sharpest photos possible.

As I immersed myself more in my photography, I discovered a passion for nature photography. I had loved reading National Geographic magazines when I was younger, and I was inspired by great photographers like Dereck and Beverly Joubert, Paul Nicklen, Tim Laman and Keith Ladzinski. I now also follow the work of other nature photographers with different styles such as Bertie Gregory, Shaaz Jung, David Yarrow, Isak Pretorius and Greg Du Toit.

My family and I have a deep love for animals and enjoy watching them in the wild. My father grew up in Africa and he regaled us with stories about being on safari with his parents. When my sister was old enough to handle several hours of being still in a vehicle, we went on our first safari to South Africa. It is an incredible experience to be able to witness animals in the wild and learn about their habitat and behaviour.

Besides several countries in Africa, we have also been fortunate to travel to India, Borneo, Canada, Mexico and Maldives. Through this process, I got to see and photograph amazing endangered animals such as tigers, orangutans, polar bears, mako sharks and green turtles.

In addition to wildlife and landscape photography, I have been keen to try various other genres of photography. I am a certified Advanced Open Water diver and avid underwater photographer. I find underwater photography more challenging than other types of photography primarily because the animals and I are in constant motion with the water's current. My favourite underwater experience was with mako sharks in the Sea of Cortez off the coast of Mexico. I was free-diving so that I did not alter the behaviour of the sharks, and it was truly inspiring to be so close to such an amazing creature. The mako is the fastest shark on the planet and its speed rivals that of a cheetah's! To free dive and be so close to the animal, while taking pictures and watch it zip across every few seconds, was an exhilarating adventure.

Underlying every aspect of my photography is my love for the natural world. Although I started out photographing wildlife, over time other aspects of nature amazed and captivated me. Whether it is the open fields of the African savanna, the glaciers of Iceland, expansive coral reefs, or far away galaxies, my passion for photography is inextricably linked with the world and environment around me.

Through my photographic journey, I have been fortunate to receive guidance from various mentors and have received a few awards. In 2016 and 2019, I was awarded the *Youth Travel Photographer of the Year Award*. In 2017, I was named the *Asian Geographic Youth Photographer of the Year*. My proudest moment was in 2018 when two of my photographs were highly honoured by *Nature's Best Photography Asia* and I received the awards at the *Smithsonian Museum* in Washington DC. In 2019, one of my images was again highly honoured by *Nature's Best Photography Asia*.

I had first thought of creating *Survivors* a year ago. I am aware that there are many accomplished conservation photographers and my pictures as an amateur photographer will probably vary from those of professional photo takers. However, several people I have met and learnt from, have been incredibly supportive and encouraging of this endeavour.

In particular, I believe that wildlife conservation is as important a global initiative for my generation as fighting climate change and eradicating poverty. Consequently, I want to lend my voice to this fight and hope that my pictures and words will convince people that this is a worthy cause that requires our time, attention and effort. I am inspired by author Aliyyah Eniath who said: "Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints, kill nothing but time." Over the last five years, I have been fortunate to have the opportunity to document many animals in the wild, each a survivor against the forces of hunting, habitat loss, and climate change. My book, *Survivors*, is the product of these several years of travel and photography.

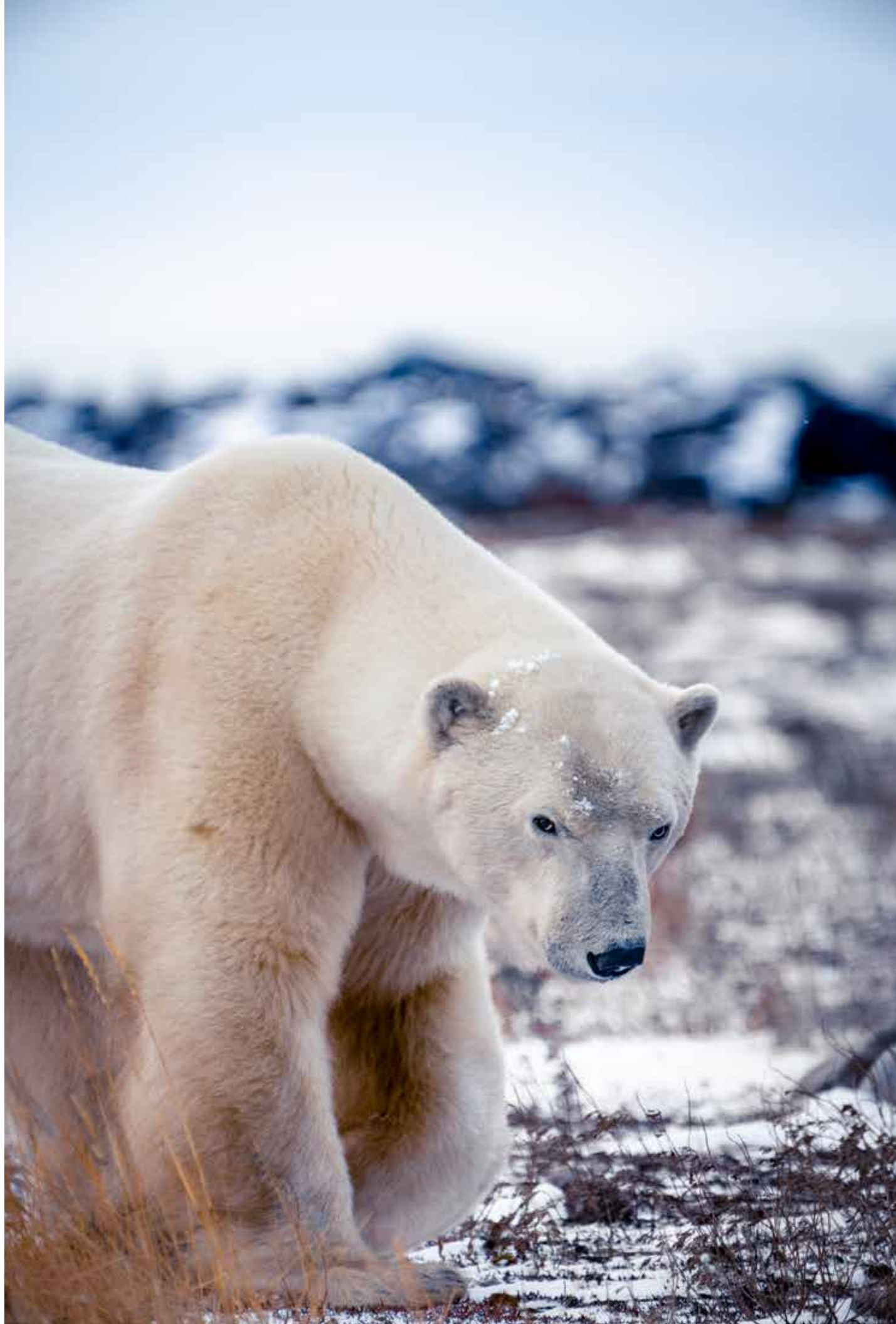
All proceeds from the sale of *Survivors* and related fundraising efforts will be donated to the *Great Plains Foundation* to help in their continued mission to protect these wonderful animals. Thank you for helping me and for contributing towards making this book a success.

Ankit Kumar

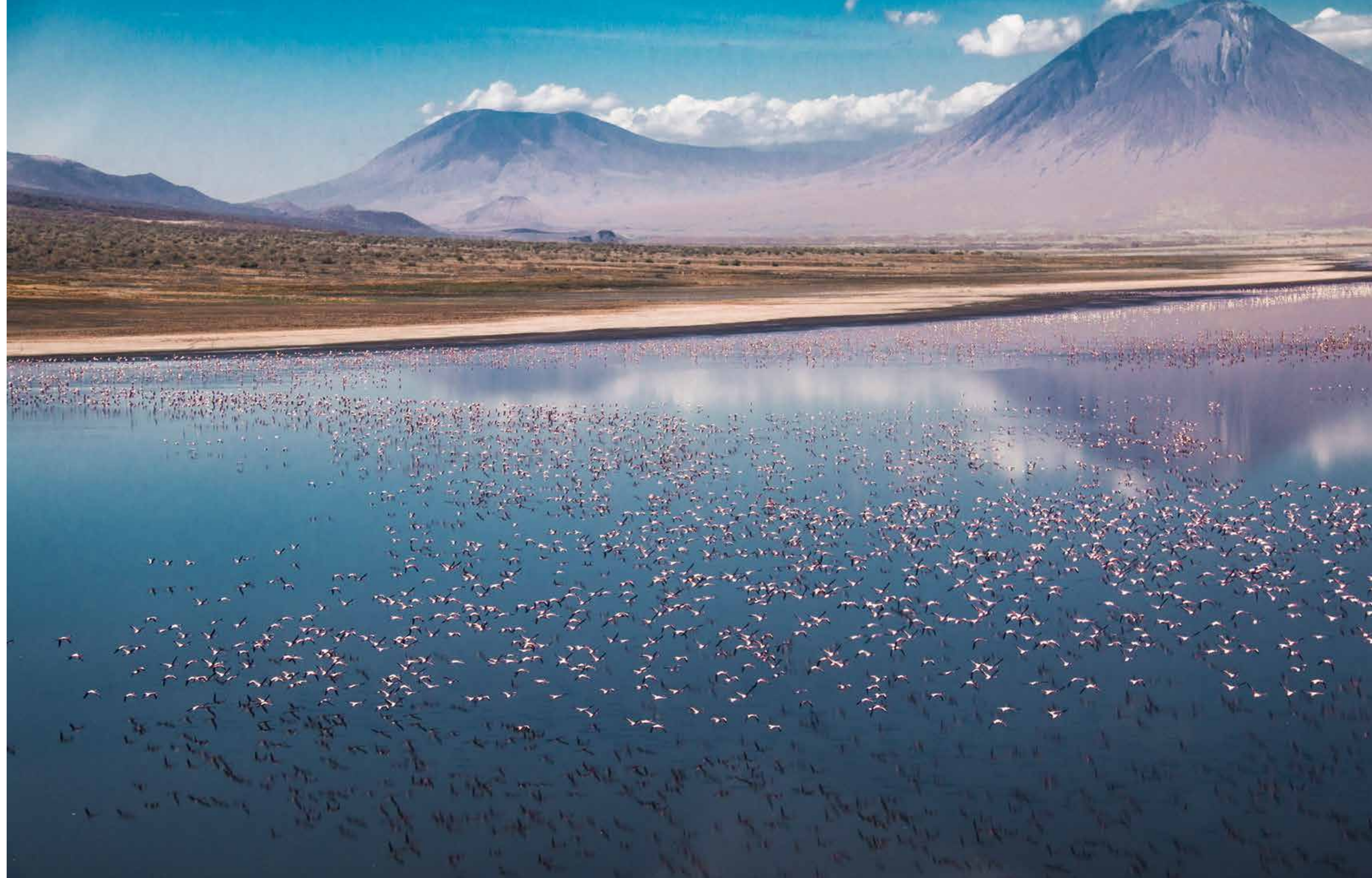




A polar bear looks curiously at me crouched behind a small mound several meters away. The yellow tinge on this bear's coat was a result of dirt accumulated over warmer months which would be washed away once cooler weather set in and the hunt in Hudson Bay began in earnest. This photo was taken mid-October in Churchill, Canada, where the bears congregate before they make their northwardly journey. Global warming has had a significant negative impact on the polar bear's habitat and has resulted in dwindling numbers of this ferocious predator. They are the largest land carnivores on earth, and despite their endearing appearance, are fierce hunters.



Lake Natron in Tanzania is home to the world's largest "pink parade", where over two million lesser flamingo can be seen annually. These flamingos thrive in the super-alkaline water which hosts immense blooms of microscopic blue-green algae. The water is hostile to most other forms of life and even strips away human skin. Lesser flamingos, however, have adapted with special skin and scales on their legs which prevent burns. Even this habitat is at risk now, as attempts to remove soda ash from the lake affects the delicate balance and survival of these beautiful birds. Ol Doinyo Lengai, meaning the Mountain of God, is an active volcano visible in the background.



A mako shark approaches the camera, its dorsal fin cutting through the water, leaving a wake of bubbles. The mako shark is the fastest animal in water and is incredibly difficult to photograph due to its relatively shy nature and fairly unpredictable movement. This photo was taken in the Sea of Cortez in Mexico. With an abundance of marine life and its warm waters, the Sea of Cortez is an absolute dream for divers and photographers alike. While I was in awe of the mako's strength, there was also a sense of visceral fear, being so out far out of my element - totally unfounded though, as makos prefer not to engage with humans.





Mako sharks have one of the highest brain:body ratios of any shark studied, hinting at a high level of intelligence. This particular species of the mako, the longfin, is seldom seen at the surface, typically staying at a depth greater than 50 metres. Longfin makos have never attacked humans in recorded history. Unfortunately, these sharks are even lower in numbers than the shortfin makos, and both are classified as endangered (class A2D) by the IUCN redlist. This photo was taken in the Sea of Cortez, Mexico, an area known for its incredible marine wildlife. The only way to take this shot was to free dive and stay under water for reasonable periods of time as sharks are disturbed by the bubbles from scuba equipment. It was also a great opportunity to watch the animal in its natural environment rather than from behind a cage which is preferred by some photographers.





A green turtle swims by the camera, showing off the unique pattern on the side of its face and shell. This picture was captured in the Maldives as part of my PADI Sea Turtle Identification specialization course where I documented various turtles in the area. The pattern on a turtle's face is unique to an individual, similar to how a human's thumbprint is unique to them. By keeping track of all of the turtles in the reef, it is possible to record which ones are unhealthy or at risk so that remedial measures can be taken to protect them. Green turtles are listed as endangered by the IUCN and are protected from exploitation in most countries. Their population, however, continues to dwindle due to ocean pollution and over-fishing.





A lechwe (a species of water antelope which lives in the Okavango Delta in Botswana) bounds through the marsh, leaving ripples behind. Lechwe feel safest in the water, and rarely leave it for fear of being caught by predators. Shot from a helicopter, this photo was taken when the waters had just begun to recede, but the marsh remained mostly waterlogged. Having all this water around them gives the lechwe greater freedom of movement which they typically don't have in the drier months.

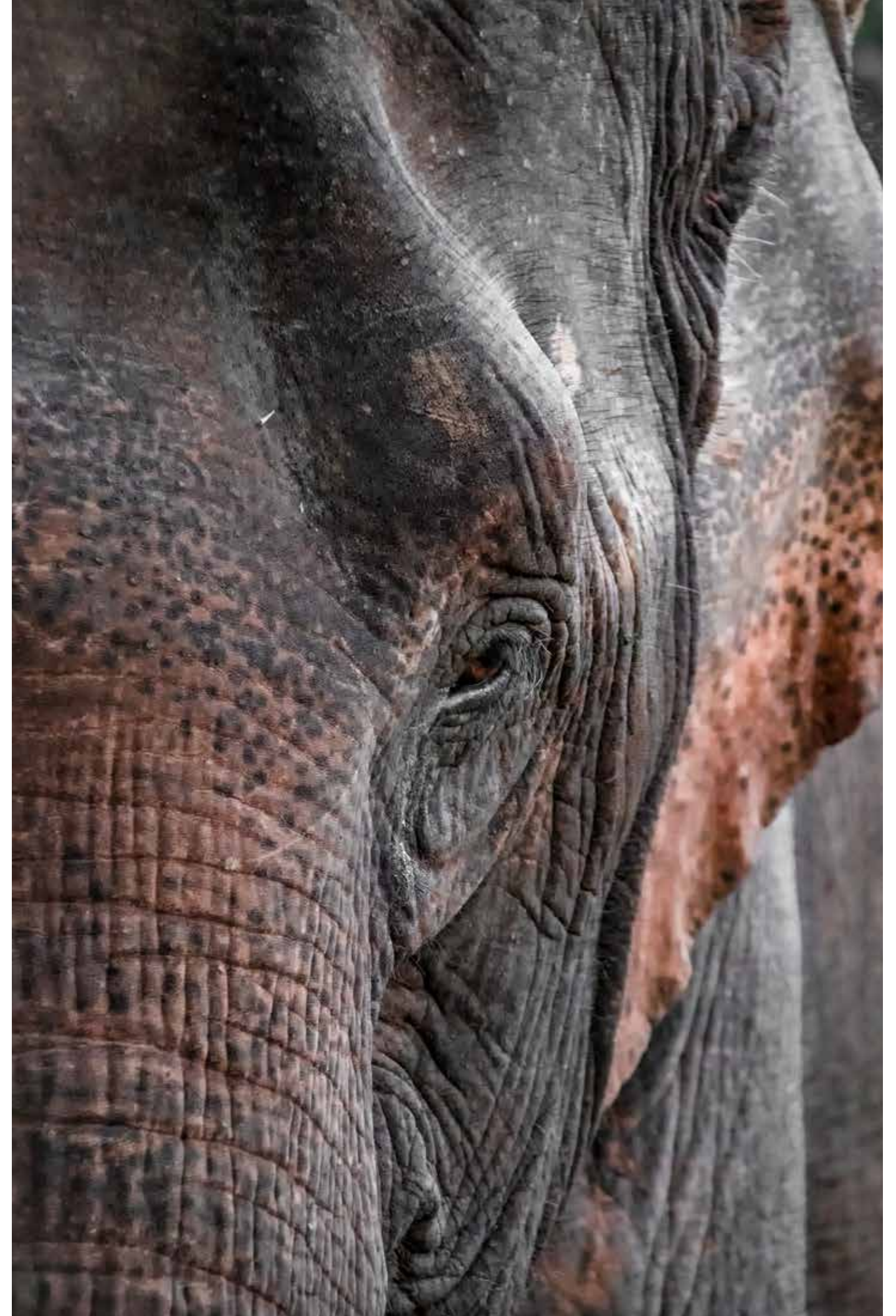




A mother elephant reaches over her calf to drink. The so-called 'blue hour' is an amazing time to be next to a watering hole - it becomes a hub of activity after sunset. Most animals are either too wary to journey there during the day or too exhausted by the heat to move. As the sun slipped below the horizon, and the sky tinted everything a gentle mauve, the thunder of footsteps against the hard-packed dirt was audible even before the elephants came into view. They trumpeted and ran towards the water, flinging mud around with reckless abandon, desperate to cool off from the oppressive summer heat. This photo was taken in Mashatu, a reserve in the Tuli Block in Botswana, famed for its elephant population and the dry landscape.



The Okavango Delta in Botswana is home to some of the most extreme populations of animals and beautiful scenery that I have seen. I am fortunate to have had an aerial perspective of this unique landscape. It is simply stunning from the air. In this picture, an elephant bull slakes his thirst while walking across a small pond in the delta. The palm tree adds drama to the scene, with the delta stretching several hundred miles beyond. Although, the elephant appears small from this angle, he was actually around 5 meters tall from foot to shoulder.





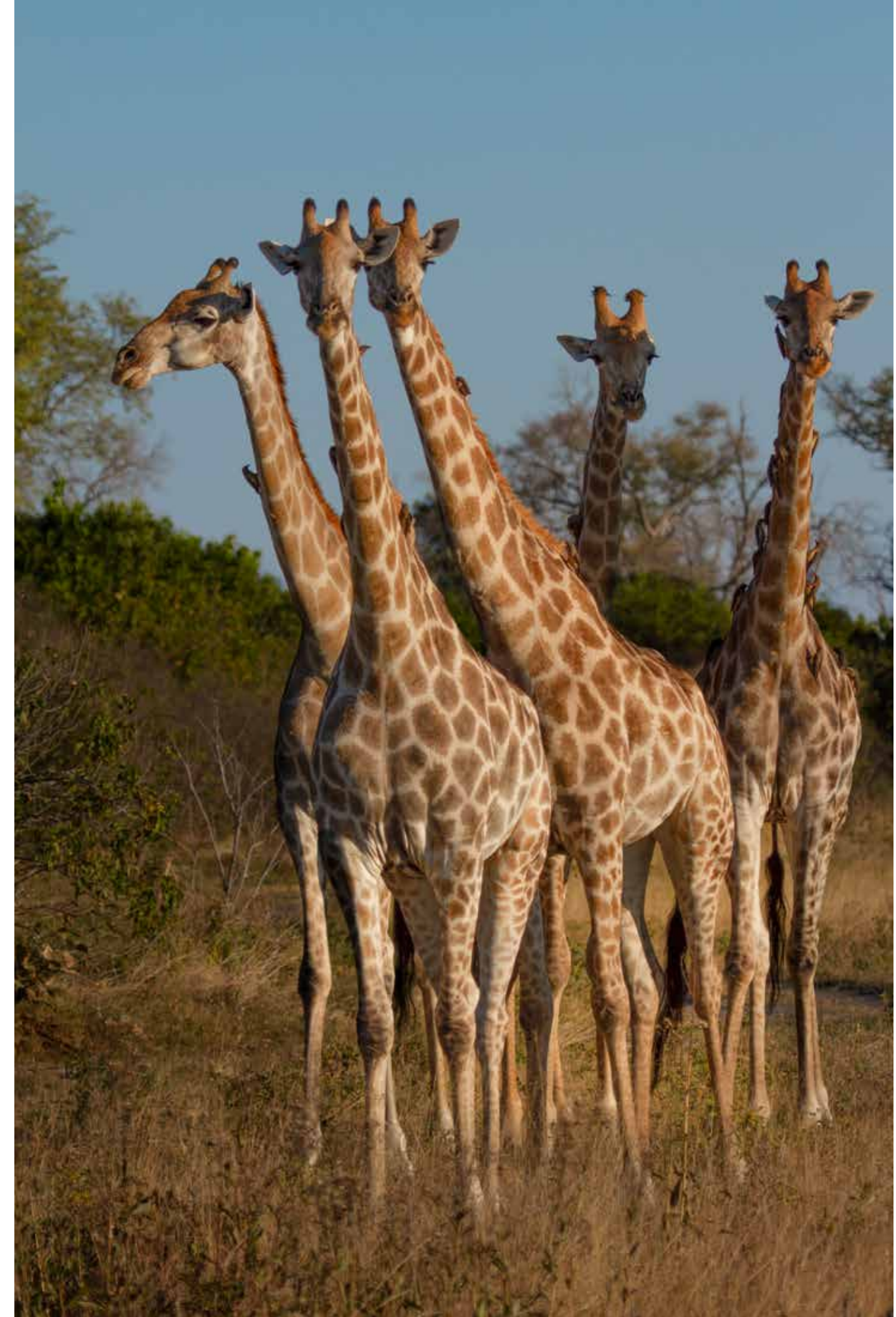


Elephants use their trunks to scan their environment, as seen in this picture. Although it couldn't see very well, this animal sensed human presence, and got close to the photographic hide where I was positioned. In spite of the animal being very relaxed, I made sure to move slowly, mindful that any quick movements might cause anxiety and discomfort to this beautiful giant. The elephant, however, was curious, and got closer to get a better whiff of the occupants of the hide. This shot was taken from the photographic hide at Mashatu game reserve in the Tuli block in Botswana, which is famous for its elephant population.









A barasingha stands in dry spring grass, bathed in warm, golden sunlight. Barasingha - meaning twelve tined in Hindi - is a swamp deer, unique among deer in India for its many tined antlers. While the population of these beautiful deer in India stands at around five thousand, they are extinct in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Approximately seven hundred and fifty of this specific species of barasingha, the Southern Swamp Deer (*Rucervus duvaucelii branderi*), live in Kanha National Park in central India.



The meerkat is a member of the mongoose family found primarily in the Kalahari Desert in Botswana and South Africa. Meerkats live in groups called mobs or clans and can number up to 50 members. In the wild, meerkats live between six and seven years. I encountered this meerkat and its clan in the Tswalu Kalahari reserve in Northern Cape, South Africa. While these meerkats are wild, they are habituated to human presence and are comfortable with photographers being around.







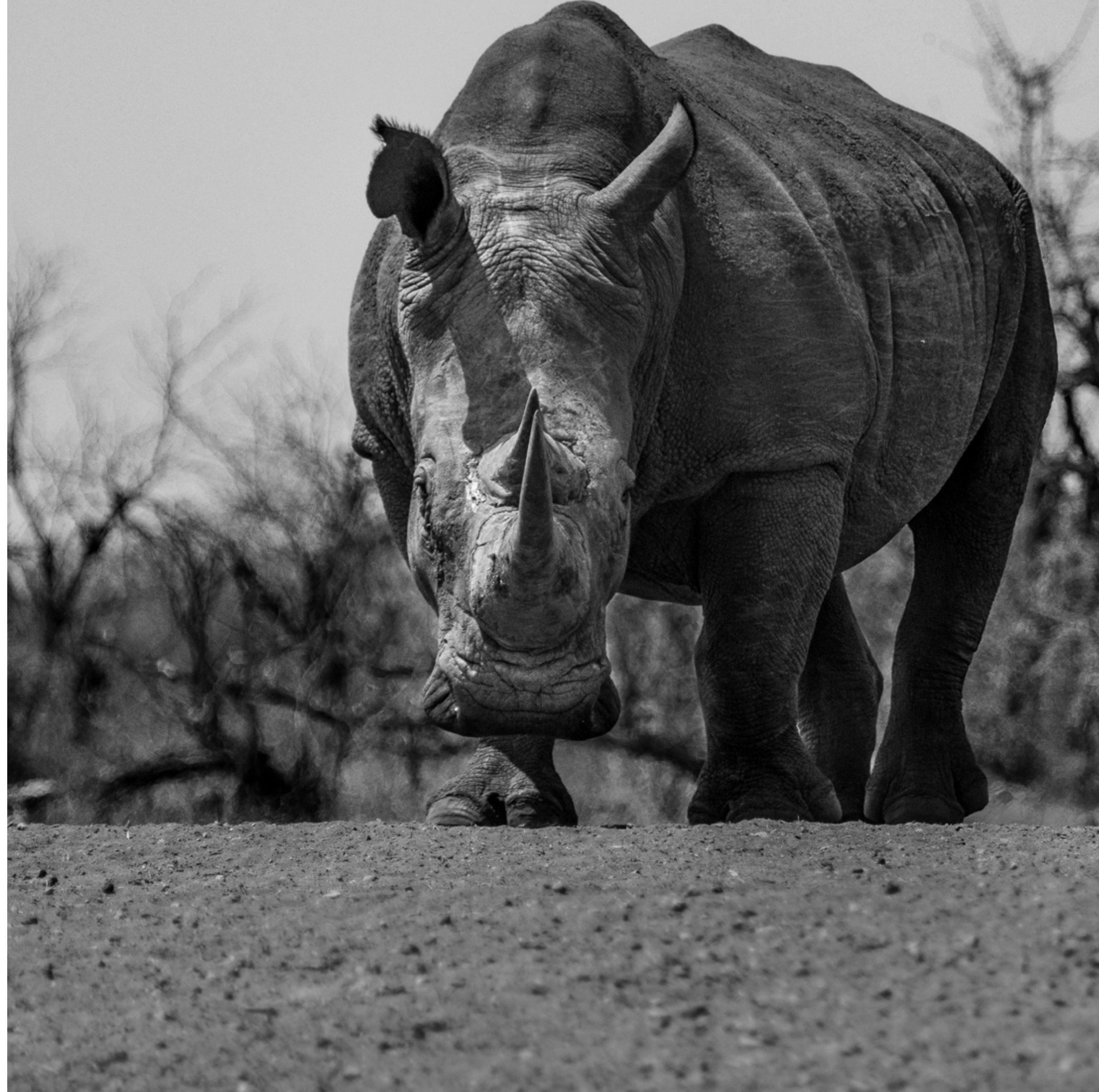




The African wild dog is the largest indigenous canid in Africa and is classified as endangered by the IUCN with fewer than seven thousand left in the wild. The decline of the wild dog has been accelerated by habitat loss, human persecution and disease outbreak. Also known as painted wolves, they are highly social, living and hunting in structured packs which can grow up to 20 adults. I saw this female wild dog in South Africa which, along with a male, had broken away from a larger group. While not common, there have been instances of wild dogs breaking away from larger groups to form their own packs. This female had appeared to have lost an ear in conflict giving it an unusual look.

The pangolin is the most trafficked animal in the world. Mammals with large protective keratin scales covering their body, pangolins are hunted for their meat and scales. They are nocturnal, tend to be solitary, and are difficult to spot in the wild. I tracked this pangolin in Tswalu Kalahari reserve in Northern Cape, South Africa. It was a privilege to spend time with it, watching it forage for food. Unfortunately, pangolins are critically endangered due to hunting and habitat loss.





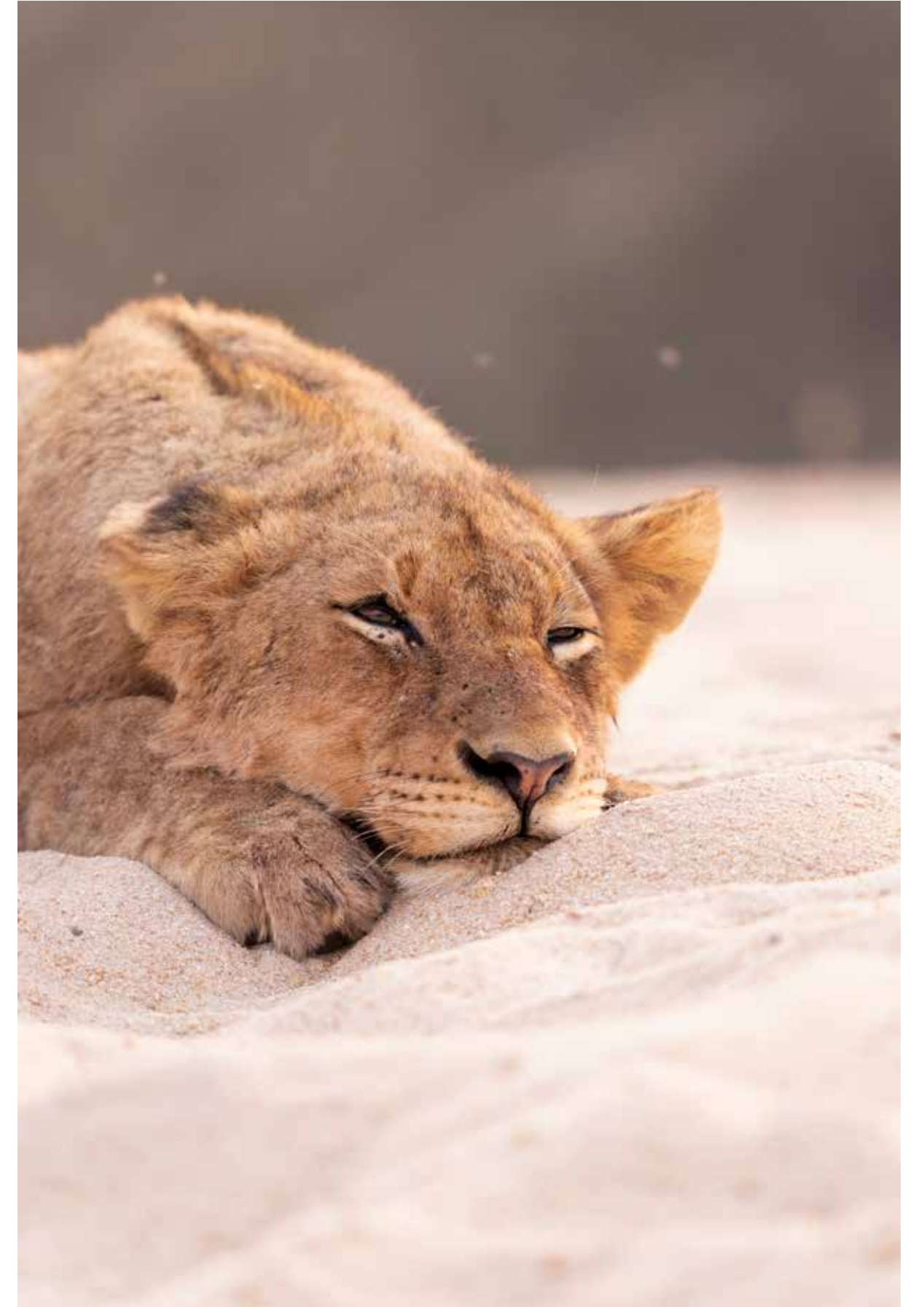






A tigress stalks through dry spring grass as the sun bathes the landscape in yellow light. Tigers, like many big cats, like to bask in the midday sun before they begin patrolling their territory in the latter part of the day. Although tiger stripes appear very distinctive to the human eye, these beautiful cats are able to camouflage themselves effortlessly amongst the reeds and grasses found in their habitat. The Bengal tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*) is one of the biggest wild cats alive today. Victims of habitat loss and relentless poaching, it is estimated that there are only 2,500 of these graceful felines left in the wild. This picture was taken in the Bandhavgarh National Park, home to the highest density of tigers in India.







A lioness perches on a tree and locks eyes with my camera. Adult lions generally don't climb trees, as the advantage is minimal compared to the effort put in. However, in some parts of Africa, lions have taken to climbing trees to scan for prey. Climbing trees also affords them some respite from the summer heat. While not the most imposing sight, they do look very sweet perched up there. This picture was taken in Grumeti reserve near the Serengeti in Tanzania.



A pride of lions faces off against a herd of buffalo. Notorious for being successful only five percent of the time, these lions lack the skill it requires to take down one of Africa's most dangerous animals. This hunt was an example of their poor buffalo hunting skills. Although they had chased after a calf and brought it down, the lions didn't manage to kill. It wasn't long before rest of the herd charged the lions. The calf struggled to its feet, and was eventually able to escape the lions. Before it ran away, the calf took one last look at its attackers, resulting in this shot of the showdown between the lions and the buffalo.











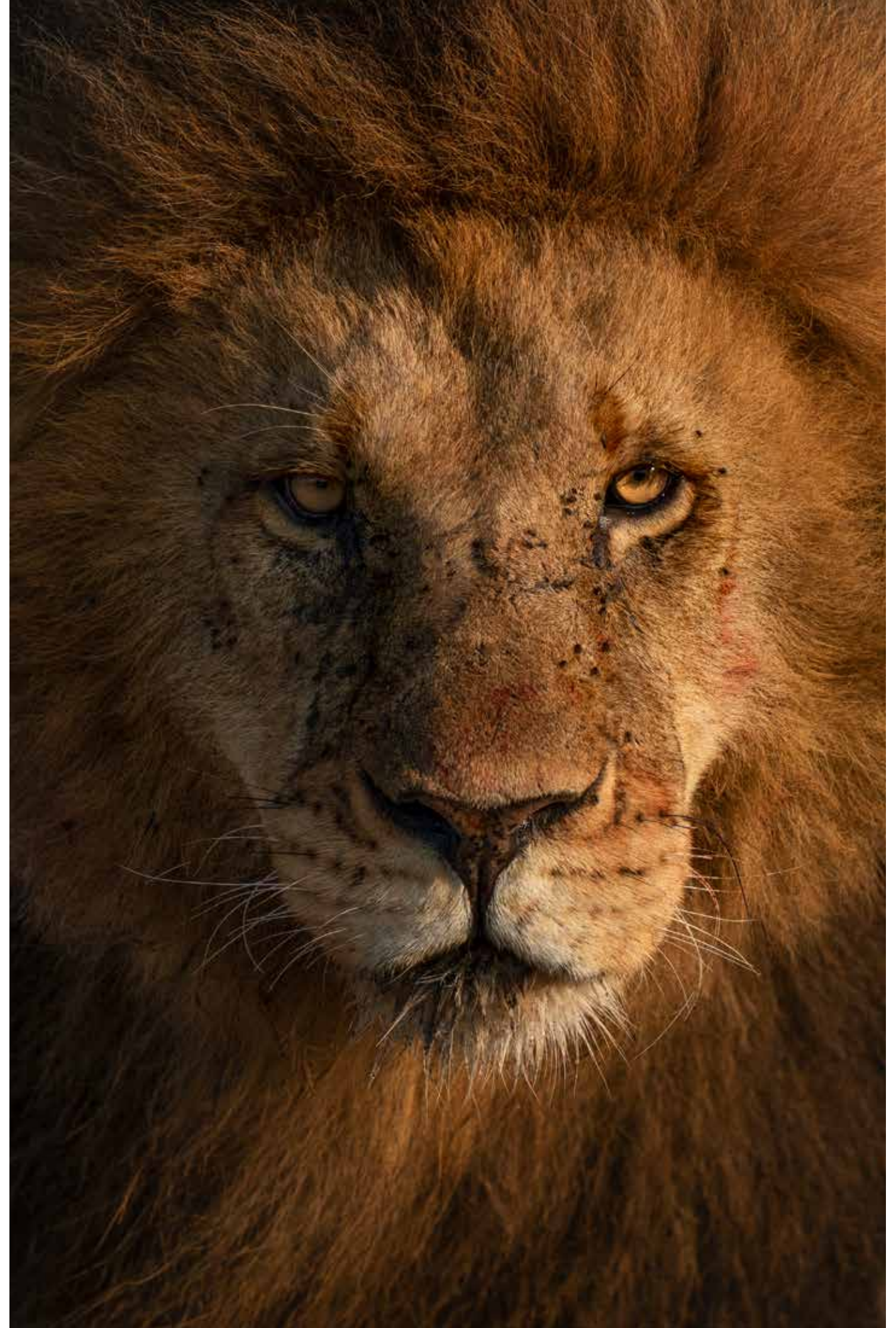


A lioness carries her young cub by the scruff, quickly crossing the open fields to the relative safety of the bush. Given the large number of predators around, such as hyena, leopard or even male lions from a rival pride, the mother was hyper-vigilant and conscious of the fact that danger could come from any direction. To take this photo, I had removed the vehicle door, and was crouched down to get an eye level shot of the lioness. This picture was taken in the Olare Motorogi Conservancy which is next to the Maasai Mara National Reserve in Kenya.



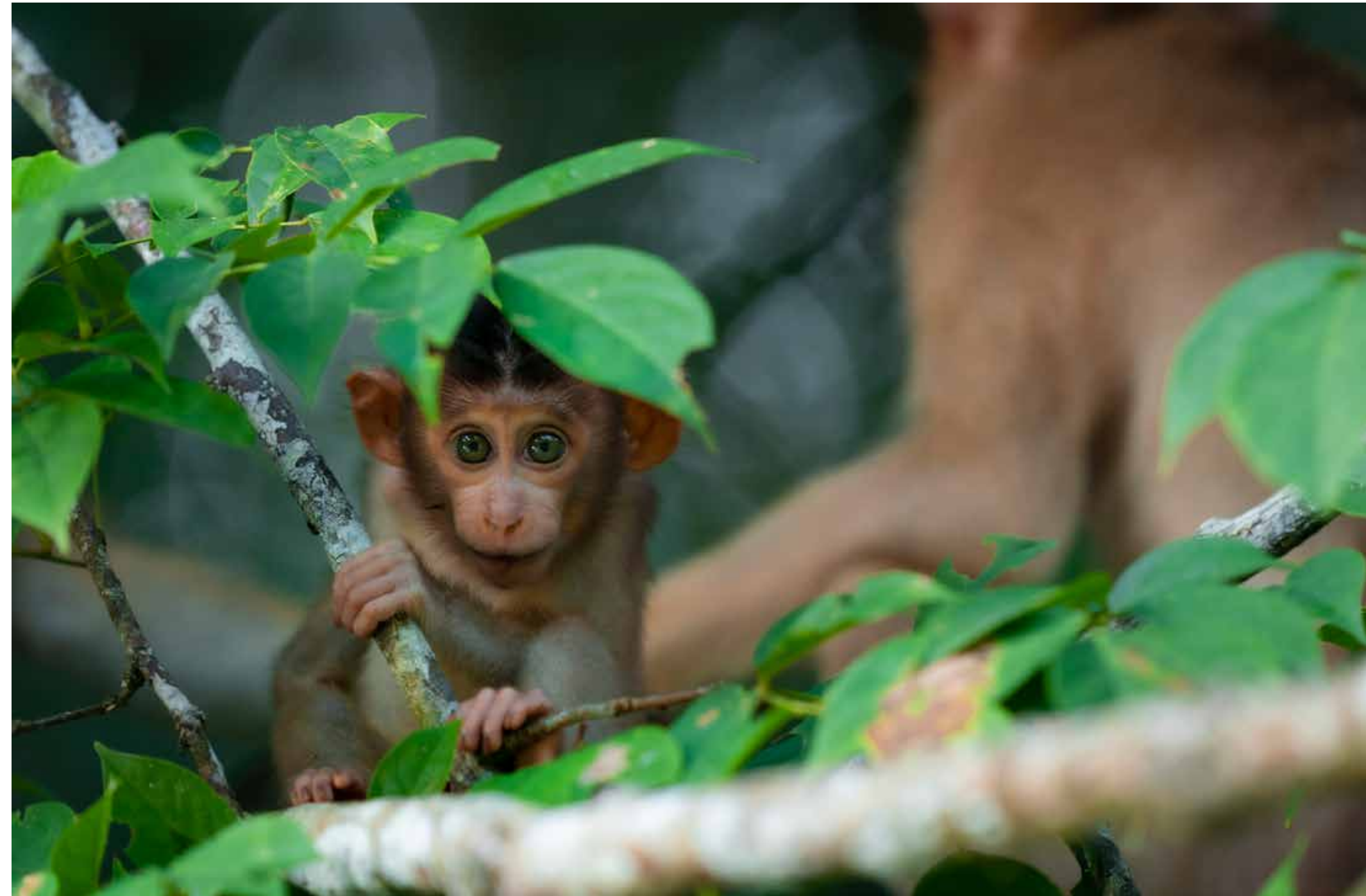
Lion cubs survey the area around them in a behavior pattern they will soon adopt as adult lions. Although they were a few months old, the cubs were hidden in a thicket while the adults in the pride chased off juvenile lions from a rival pride. While waiting for their parents to return, the cubs had a romp on the mound, knocking each other over, yowling and snarling at one another. By the time I had gotten closer, they had settled down and were sitting next to each other, tired from the play fighting. I was lucky to get this shot at eye-level as lion cubs are typically lying down on flat ground and the photographer is at a few feet high in the vehicle. This photo was taken in the Grumeti Reserve, a wildlife reserve next to the Serengeti National Park in Tanzania.







A pig-tailed macaque grabs onto a branch as it peers into the camera. This infant macaque is very dependent on its mother, seen in the back, but curious enough to explore and investigate its surroundings. Taken from a moving boat, this photo presented some challenges, but rewarded me with an eye level shot. This species of macaque is a primate found along the Kinabatangan River in Borneo which is special for its unique ecology. In recent years, however, the introduction of Malaysian palm plantations has threatened the habitat of several endemic species. It is imperative we conserve the delicate ecosystem in Borneo so that such encounters are still possible in the future.





A relaxed proboscis monkey looks enquiringly at the camera. This photo was taken along the Kinabatangan River in the Malaysian part of Borneo, famed for different species of primates, all coexisting in one area. The proboscis monkey is only found in Borneo, and is unfortunately endangered as well - these factors make seeing it quite rare, and photographing them in good light, rarer still. It was an especially rewarding experience being able to share a moment with the animal when it locked eyes with me.







A Bornean Orangutan rests its head on a branch, gazing down at the forest floor, seemingly lost in thought. These orangutans are classified as critically endangered (Class A4abcd), and face constant threats from climate change and human activity, resulting in rapid habitat loss. To be able to even see an orangutan in Borneo, one must hike several miles through thick jungle, and patiently wait for them to reveal themselves to you. As they stay high up in the trees, most times hidden within the green canopy, photographing these orangutans is fairly challenging. In order to get the orangutan to relax, and exhibit authentic behavior, you must respect its boundaries and wait till it approaches you. This photo was taken in the Danum Valley in Borneo, a 130-million-year-old ecosystem where researchers flock to study primate behavior and the unique habitat found there. Danum Valley in Malaysia is one of the last habitable places in Borneo for orangutans.



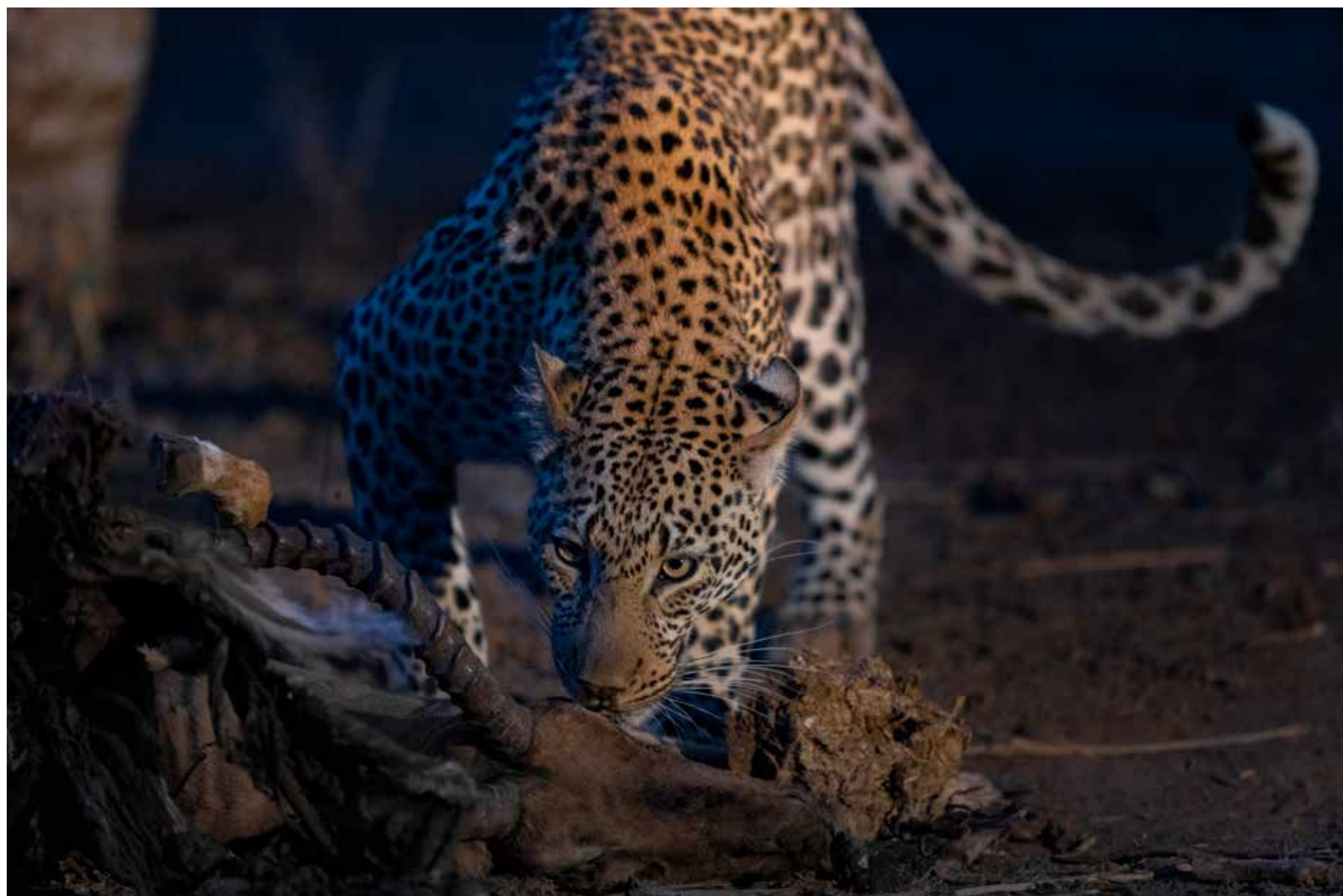


A leopardess stares down from her perch in the fork of a tree. South Luangwa in Zambia is renowned for its incredible leopard sightings and the intimate interactions between safari goers and the animals. This particular leopardess, Mama Kaingo, was chased up a tree after a late night encounter with a pride of six lions. She has a curious habit of sticking her tongue out whenever she's stressed - as seen in this picture of her scanning the ground below for lions she'd just escaped from. Although very active in August, when this picture was taken, leopards can be difficult to spot as they spend most of their time in the bush, even when hunting. They only really come out at night, and waiting for them after sunset can result in some truly incredible encounters.



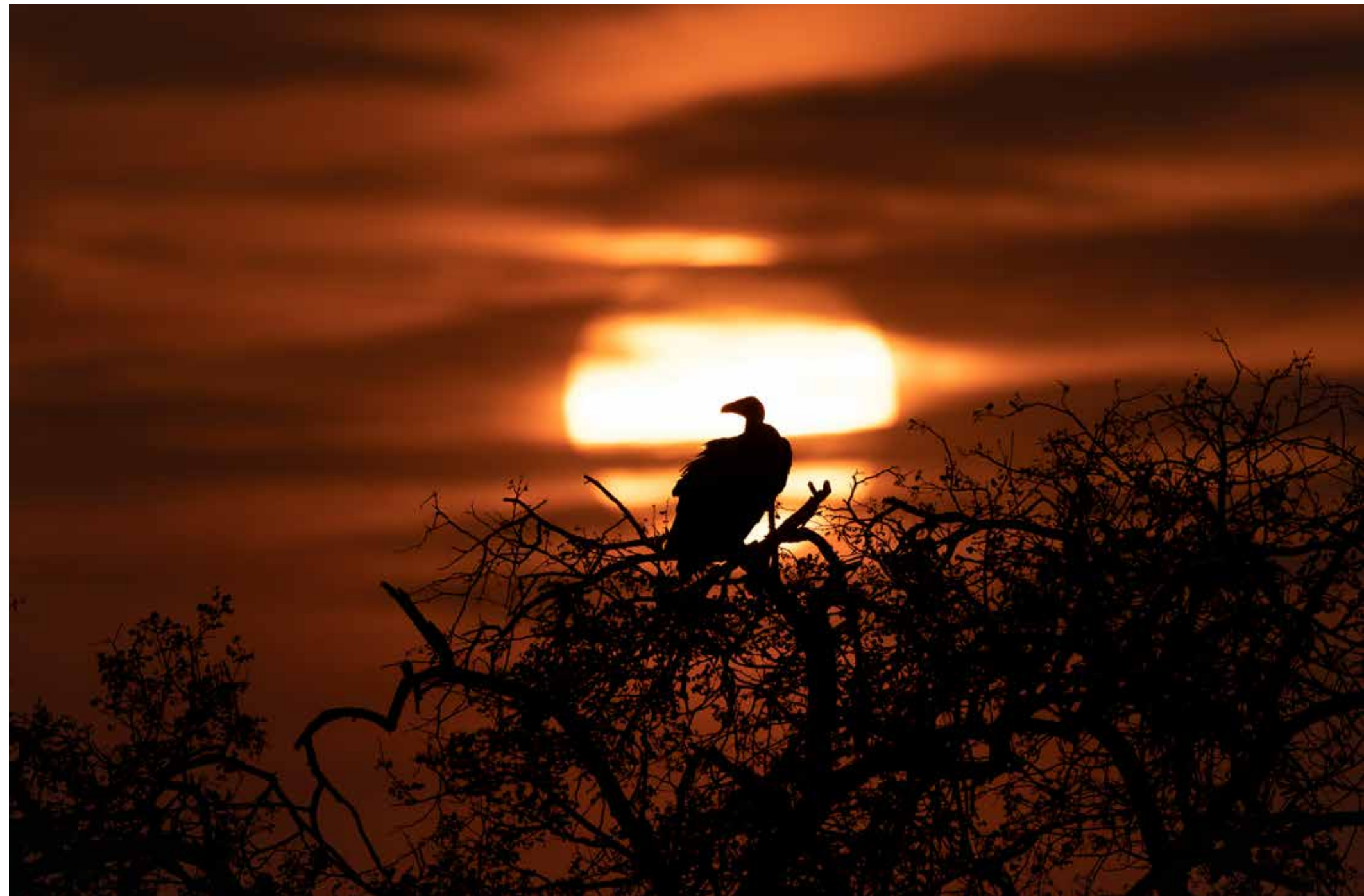


















RED LIST

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) publishes a Red List of Threatened Species which has evolved to become the world's most comprehensive information source on the global conservation status of animal, fungi and plant species. The IUCN Red List is a critical indicator of the health of the world's biodiversity. It provides information about range, population size, habitat and ecology, use and/or trade, threats, and conservation actions that will help inform necessary conservation decisions.

The IUCN Red List Categories divides species into nine categories: Not Evaluated, Data Deficient, Least Concern, Near Threatened, Vulnerable, Endangered, Critically Endangered, Extinct in the Wild and Extinct.

In my book, I document various animals that are in the Near Threatened, Vulnerable, Endangered and Critically Endangered categories as follows:

Bornean Orangutan (*Pongo pygmaeus*): Critically Endangered
Longfin Mako Shark (*Isurus paucus*): Endangered
African Wild Dog (*Lycaon pictus*): Endangered
Cape Vulture (*Gyps coprotheres*): Endangered
Green Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*): Endangered
Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*): Endangered
Bengal Tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*): Endangered
Proboscis Monkey (*Nasalis larvatus*): Endangered
Polar Bear (*Ursus maritimus*): Vulnerable
Pangolin (*Smutsia temminckii*): Vulnerable
African Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*): Vulnerable
Hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibius*): Vulnerable
Lion (*Panthera leo*): Vulnerable
Leopard (*Panthera pardus*): Vulnerable
Cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*): Vulnerable
Barasingha (*Rucervus duvaucelii*): Vulnerable
Giraffe (*Giraffa camelopardalis*): Vulnerable
Pig-tailed Macaque (*Macaca nemestrina*): Vulnerable
Lesser Flamingo (*Phoeniconaias minor*): Near Threatened
White Rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum*): Near Threatened
Southern Lechwe (*Kobus lechwe*): Near Threatened
African Buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*): Near Threatened

All proceeds from the sale of this book will be donated to the Great Plains Foundation to help in their mission to preserve African wildlife. Please support the Great Plains Foundation at www.greatplainsfoundation.com

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Book design by Studio Maria Mayer Feng LLC

Printed in Hong Kong.