

A Sharp Eye on

wildlife photography

MADAGASCAR ISSUE

Another twenty useful
photography tips
More animal magic



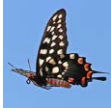





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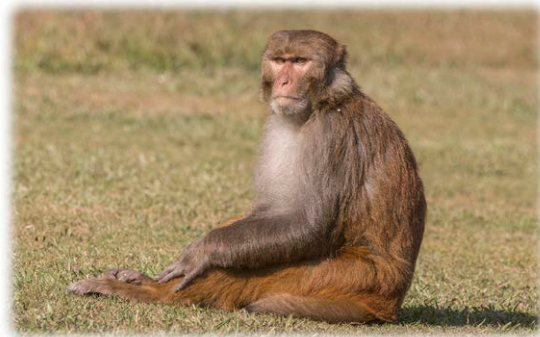
Rufous-headed ground-roller (*Atelornis crossleyi*)
Ranomafana National Park, Madagascar, November 2018
Canon EOS 80D, 400mm, 1/250 sec, F8, ISO 400



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Kevin sat on his own trying to work out what Susan had meant when she said, 'I love the simple things in life, but I don't want one of them as a husband.'



Rhesus macaque (*Macaca mulatta mulatta*), male
Gokarna Forest, Near Kathmandu, Nepal
Canon EOS 80D, 360mm, 1/640 sec, F10, ISO 400

Front cover

Ring-tailed lemur (see back cover)

Groan Animals

Free-licence images courtesy of Wikipedia photographers

Mervin got away with posing
in his wig outside the courthouse.
There were not many who could pull it off.



Later in court, Peter was accused of
feathering his own nest. He couldn't decide
if he should fly in the face of the evidence



top
Black vulture (*Coragyps atratus brasiliensis*), Belém, Brazil
Photograph Claude Meisch (Wikipedia User:Cayambe), August 2009
Nikon D300, 200mm, 1/320 sec, F9, ISO 200

bottom
House wren (*Troglodytes aedon*), Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge,
New York City, USA, July 2020
Photograph Ryan McGrady (Wikipedia User:Rhododendrites)
Olympus E-M5 Mark II, 300mm, 1/400 sec, F5.6, ISO 400

A Sharp Eye on WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY

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indicated. These are all wild animals. They were not
photographed in safari parks, rescue centres, zoos,
butterfly houses, in captivity, or in a studio.

Most full resolution images are on
Wikipedia and on Flickr.

Previous issues on the website

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Can we travel...



Common brown lemur (*Eulemur fulvus*) female with juvenile
Peyrieras Nature Reserve, Madagascar, November 2018
Canon EOS 80D, 147mm, 1/250 sec, F8, ISO 800

A Special Place... Anjajavy, Madagascar is on page 34

Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime

Mark Twain
The Innocents Abroad (1869)
His best-selling book

If there's one country in the world that could demand its own magazine issue, it is the Republic of Madagascar. The huge island of Madagascar (it is larger than Spain) is close to where humans appeared in Africa around 300,000 years ago, but it was not colonised until around 500AD.

Humans were late to discover the island, but have still managed to lay waste to most of it. Half the forest that existed in the 1950s has been destroyed. There is a good chance that half the lemur species will have been wiped out before my grandchildren turn 40.

Poverty is one reason behind the continued destruction of wildlife habitat. Per capita GDP is \$1,500 and 70% of the population earn less than \$1/day. Life expectancy is 65. *Transparency International* said in 2019 that 'inefficient governance, poverty and economic instability fuel corruption and push the population to dangerous mining, looting of forest resources and trafficking in wildlife products to sustain themselves'.

It is an amazing place to visit for wildlife, with dozens of different lemurs and colourful chameleons. 70% of the animal species are endemic. It is one of the few places on the planet where you have a realistic chance of photographing a new species. But it is not an easy place to get around. There is no coast road and most trips involve flying out of Tana (Antananarivo, the capital) and back again, then out to another location.

We have been twice and will be back. Fano from *Encounter Madagascar*, based in Tana, organised our last four-week tour. Efficient, flexible and friendly, we will use them again.

Charles Sharp

... yet stay safe?

Tip #61 Discover a new species

There are not many places in the world where you have a chance to discover a new species.

Madagascar is one of them. I was slightly miffed that my wife found this frog. It wasn't in my 2007 edition of Glaw & Vences, the authoritative field guide to the amphibians and reptiles of Madagascar with its excellent images.

I reckoned the frog was a close relative of *Boophis picturatus*, first described by Glaw & Vences in 2001. Soon after uploading it to Wikipedia, another Madagascar expert herpetologist Dr Mark Scherz identified it as a juvenile *Boophis cf. roseipalmatus*. cf means it looks like *roseipalmatus*, a species that was described in 2010 by Glaw & Vences – three years after their book was printed.

In his career so far, Mark Scherz has described 57 new species of frog, nine geckos and nine chameleons.



Bright-eyed frog (*Boophis cf. roseipalmatus*) juvenile
Montagne d'Ambre National Park, Madagascar, December 2018
Canon EOS 80D, 100mm, 1/250 sec, F11, ISO 200 with flash

Tip #62 Tap into local knowledge

We sometimes use UK-based specialists but we also book direct with tour agencies in the countries we visit. *Encounter Madagascar* provided us with excellent drivers and guides all over Madagascar. Solo drove us from Tana to Andasibe then down to Toliara. Our specialist wildlife guide in Ranomafana National Park had a friend who knew where we might be able to see a civet. It was no good hoping to see one in the National Park, because they kick you out before it gets dark. The spotted fanaloka is still known locally as the (Malagasy) civet. It is one of the ten endemic species of *Eupleridae*, another of which is the ring-tailed vontsira on page 14.

In Kenya, our excellent guide was Chege wa Kariuki from *Birdwatching East Africa*. Chege knows an entrepreneurial self-taught man who spends all night locating owls in the forest around Lake Baringo. Owls are vulnerable to predators while they roost during the day. Owls have camouflage plumage and some, like the Northern white-faced owl, adopt a 'concealing posture'. It folds one wing across its chest – like an early Count Dracula with his cloak – to conceal its white underparts. It pulls itself up and stands tall, making it look impossibly thin. It erects its ear tufts and narrows its eyes to slits. It rearranges its feathers so that the white eyebrows are hidden behind darker feathers.



Spotted fanaloka (*Fossa fossana*), Ranomafana National Park, Madagascar, November 2018
Canon EOS 80D, 135mm, 1/250 sec, F8, ISO 200, off-camera flash



Northern white-faced owl (*Prilopsis leucotis*)
Lake Baringo, Kenya, October 2016
Canon EOS 80D, 400mm, 1/1000 sec, F5.6, ISO 640

Tip #63

Become a society portrait photographer

Madagascar is the land of lemurs but every species is on the IUCN red list of threatened species, with many classified Critically Endangered (CR). Just one step away from extinction in the wild. Habitat loss continues and the small pockets of forest that remain are isolated from each other. Mouse lemurs are the smallest lemurs. The nocturnal Nosy Be mouse lemur weighs around 60gm. It was only described as a new species in 2006. The Indri is the largest (~7kg) and noisiest. The Indris vocalize every morning and sing duets which you can hear 4km away.

Lemur society is organised by the females. The troops are not shy so you can approach, but most species stay in the trees. The ring-tailed lemurs are easier to photograph as they spend time on the ground showing off their impressive tails (see the cover photos). They are classified as Endangered (EN), not CR even though there are only around 2,000 left in the wild.



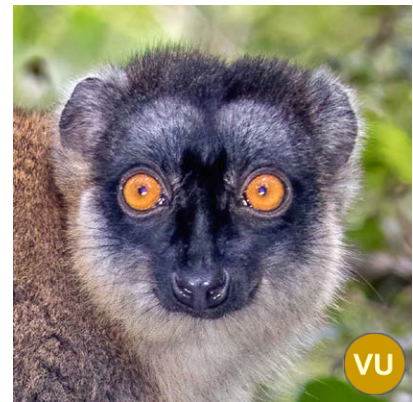
Nosy Be mouse lemur
(*Microcebus mampiratra*)



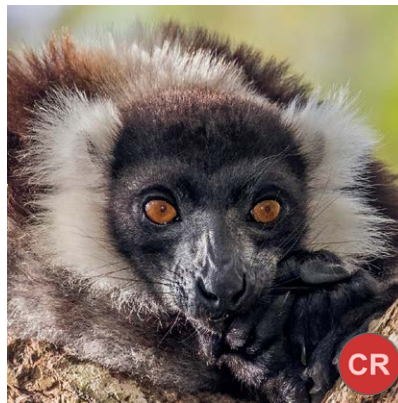
Crossley's dwarf lemur
(*Cheirogaleus crossleyi*)



Crowned lemur
(*Eulemur coronatus*) female



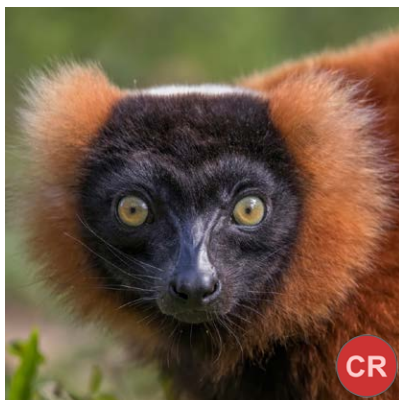
Common brown lemur
(*Eulemur fulvus*) female



Black and white ruffed lemur
(*Varecia variegata variegata*)



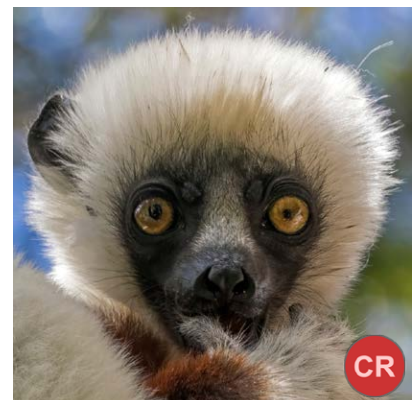
Hill's ruffed lemur
(*Varecia variegata editorum*) male



Red ruffed lemur
(*Varecia rubra*)



Verreaux's sifaka
(*Propithecus verreauxi*)



Coquerel's sifaka
(*Propithecus coquereli*)



Nosy Be sportive lemur
(*Lepilemur tymerlachsoni*)

CR



Ankarana sportive lemur
(*Lepilemur ankaranensis*)

EN



Ring-tailed lemur
(*Lemur catta*)

EN



Sanford's brown lemur
(*Eulemur sanfordi*) male

EN



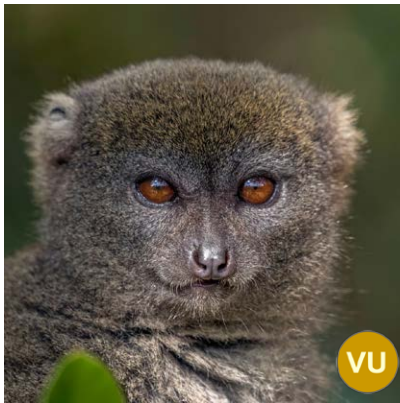
Red-fronted brown lemur
(*Eulemur rufifrons*)

EN



Black lemur
(*Eulemur macaco*) female

EN



Grey bamboo lemur
(*Haplemur griseus griseus*)

VU



Golden bamboo lemur
(*Haplemur aureus*)

CR



Greater bamboo lemur
(*Prolemur simus*) male

CR



Milne Edwards's sifaka
(*Propithecus edwardsi*)

EN



Diademed sifaka
(*Propithecus diadema*)

CR



Indri
(*Indri indri*)

CR

Animal Magic

Free-licence images courtesy of Wikipedia photographers

Attacus taprobanis has a wingspan of 170-220mm. It was once considered a subspecies of the much more common Atlas moth, one of the largest moths in the world. This one was photographed shortly after it emerged from its cocoon. It has no mouth so cannot eat. It lives off stored energy for its brief lifespan of one to two weeks.



Attacus taprobanis, Kadavoor, Kerala, India
Photograph Jeevan Jose (Wikipedia User:Jkadavoor)
Sony Alfa ILCA-77M2, 150mm, 1/250 sec, F14,
ISO 400, with flash, July 2018

The red-footed tortoise spends more than half the day inactive. After a big meal they can remain completely stationary for five to ten days.



Red-footed tortoise (*Chelonoidis carbonaria*)
Morrocoy National Park, Venezuela
Photograph Wilfredo Rodríguez (Wikipedia User:Wilfredor)
Nikon D300, 42mm, 1/60 sec, F5.3, ISO 320, November 2012

Tip #64

Have a packing list

If you are off to Paris or Rome and you forget something, you'll be able to buy it the first morning. If your kit starts playing up, you can replace it. In Madagascar, this may not be possible. You need a packing list. Those of you who were sent off to boarding school at a tender age will know what I mean (though you won't need name tags):

1. Two camera bodies, plus a third as a spare
2. 6 x camera batteries; 2 x chargers
3. 2 x 64GB memory cards (leave them in situ)
4. 100-400mm, 24-70mm, 100mm macro lenses
5. 1.4 extender (tele-converter)
6. Helicon Focus FB Tube (for focus-stacking)
7. Speedlight flash, 4 x longlife batteries
8. 8 x AA rechargeable batteries/charger
9. Flash diffuser; folding reflector disc
10. Magbeam fresnel lens flash extender
11. Xtar H3 Warboy head torch
12. Lithium-ion 3100mAh battery and charger
13. Wimberley Plamp II plant grip
14. Laptop, charger; 2 x USB cables
15. 3 x USB 3.0 64GB memory sticks
16. 3-pin x4 gang socket; 2 x adaptors
17. Manfrotto monopod (and top lock plate)
18. Digipad sensor-cleaning kit, lens cloths
19. Screwdriver set (not in your carry-on bag)
20. Replacement dial mode cap cover (Canon)
21. Utility belt: camera holster and water bottle
22. Waterproof jacket, backpack, dry bags
23. Green (animal safe) laser light pens, batteries
24. Field guides: hard copy & digital
25. Tilley hat (and instruction book)

Tip #65

Chase after a flying butterfly

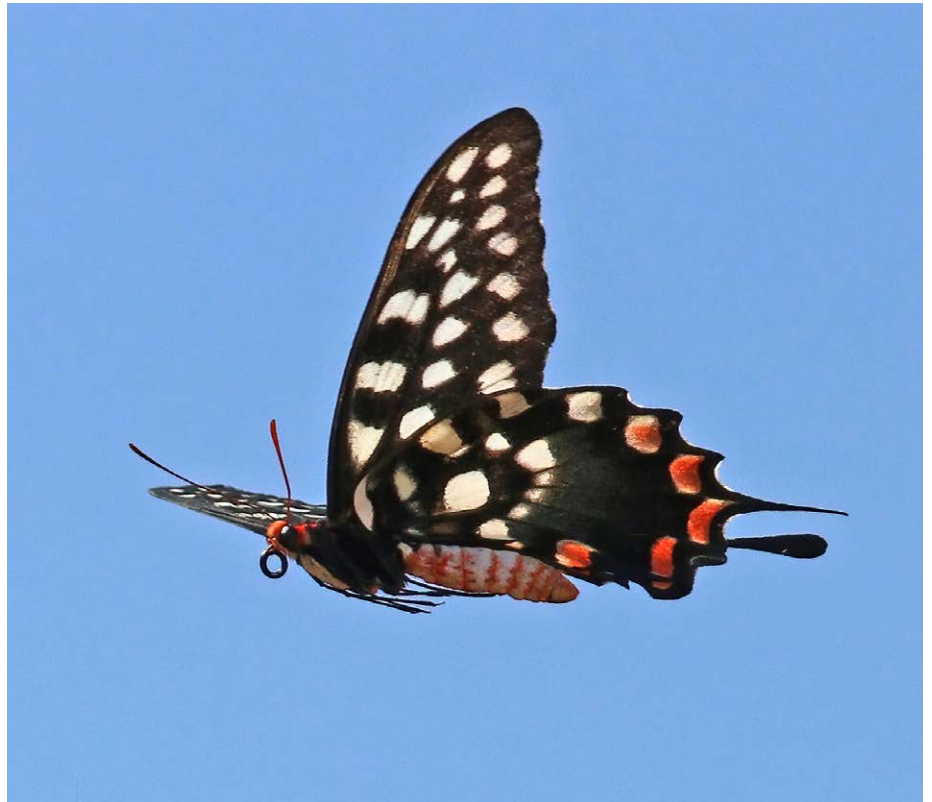
There used to be drawings of children running after butterflies with nets. Only researchers should do that now but chasing them to get a photo is still OK. Butterflies do not follow a predictable flight path, so you are going to look pretty silly scampering around, twisting and turning and cursing. I've found that I cannot track them using the full zoom on my 100-400mm zoom lens, so I start at 100mm and try to zoom in once the camera has locked on.

The Madagascar giant swallowtail is, as its name suggests, a large butterfly and a Madagascar endemic. The wingspan is 12-14cm. My pursuit was on open ground where I did not have to be too careful where I placed my feet.

The second image is the chrysalis of the Madagascar giant swallowtail. Like all members of the *Papilionidae* family, a larva (caterpillar) ready to pupate spins a silken girdle around its waist like a professional lineman.

I cannot separate the aesthetic pleasure I feel when I see a butterfly from the scientific pleasure of knowing what it is

Vladimir Nabokov
1959 interview for
Sports Illustrated



Madagascar giant swallowtail (*Pharmacophagus antenor*)
Belalanda, Near Toliara, Madagascar, November 2018
Canon EOS 80D, 142mm, 1/2000 sec, F9, ISO 400



Madagascar giant swallowtail (*Pharmacophagus antenor*) chrysalis
Isalo National Park, Madagascar, November 2018
Canon EOS 80D, 400mm, 1/250 sec, F13, ISO 400

Groan Animals

Jacob had read that silence is argument
carried out by other means



Che Guevara, quoted in *Secrets to a Richer Life* by Earl Guile

Frank's ideation of his organic architectural design
blended impeccable ergonomics and sustainability
into a new vernacular, with the woven portal an
immersive touchpoint for safe-space interaction



^{top}
Yellow-billed oxpeckers (*Buphagus africanus*) on a zebra
near Karang, Senegal, December 2016
Canon EOS 70D, 400mm, 1/800 sec, F5.6, ISO 800

^{bottom}
Black-headed weaver (*Ploceus cucullatus bohndorffi*) male nest building
Queen Elizabeth National Park, Uganda, October 2016
Canon EOS 70D, 400mm, 1/2000 sec, F5.6, ISO 320

Tip #66

Anticipate the action

Whales and dolphins are proper teases. They dive and you calculate exactly where they will re-emerge. But they surface somewhere completely different. They may be bright, but they've not learnt to swim in a straight line. If you want to fill the frame, you have to anticipate and be prepared for long minutes of frustration. They only surface for a short time and by the time your camera has focused, they've gone. Manual focus gives you a better chance.

You might imagine that all the whale species in the world would have been identified hundreds of years ago. But this one, the Omura's whale, was only described in 2003.

I skate to where the puck
is going to be

Wayne Gretzky
World's greatest (ice) hockey player

Tip #67

Be patient

Most people know that Madagascar's lemurs are endangered and the same is true of some endemic birds. Until recently, the Amber Mountain rock thrush was a separate species. Bird guides, familiar with its song, are still convinced it is. There are fewer than 5,000 left, living in a small forest of fewer than 10,000 hectares in the Montagne d'Ambre National Park in the north of the island.

It is a shy bird which forages in the understorey. The chances of a photograph of the bird in the open are slim. Fill-in flash is not enough as there is so little light. So what are the ethics for the flash photography of birds? There are two main considerations. Firstly, does the flash adversely affect the bird? There is temporary vision impairment from flash and this may make an animal more vulnerable to predators.



Omura's whale (*Balaenoptera omurai*) breaching off Nosy Be, Madagascar, December 2018
 Canon EOS 80D, 114mm, 1/2000 sec, F10, ISO 400

My answer is to use the minimum (off-axis) flash possible, underexpose the shot, then brighten the exposure later at home. I limit myself to two shots per bird, having tested my settings with no birds around. The second consideration is whether a quality shot of a

rare bird will help conservation. This was the deciding factor for this endangered species. We spent a couple of hours in the forest, acclimatizing and listening and watching and waiting. Our patience was rewarded with a male and a female.



Amber mountain rock thrush (*Monticola sharpei erythronotus*) male
 Montagne d'Ambre National Park, Madagascar, December 2018
 Canon EOS 80D, 400mm, 1/250 sec, F8, ISO 500 with flash



Amber mountain rock thrush (*Monticola sharpei erythronotus*) female
 Montagne d'Ambre National Park, Madagascar, December 2018
 Canon EOS 80D, 400mm, 1/250 sec, F5.6, ISO 500 with flash

Animal Magic

The giraffe-necked weevil is a leaf-rolling beetle, so its long neck comes in handy. The female has a shorter neck and uses it to roll a leaf into a nest for its egg. As with real giraffes, the males fight using their necks. They try to knock rivals off a leaf like macho contestants in some ghastly TV show.



Giraffe-necked weevil (*Trachelophorus giraffa*)
Andasibe-Mantadia National Park, Madagascar
Canon EOS 80D, 100mm, 1/250 sec, F4.5, ISO 500

The giant pill millipede is much shorter than most millipedes. When disturbed, it rolls itself into a hard ball the size of a ping pong ball. If it is on a slope, the ball will roll away to safety. The Malagasy name is *tainkintana* – meaning meteorite. Seven new Madagascar species were announced in 2014. I cannot identify this one.

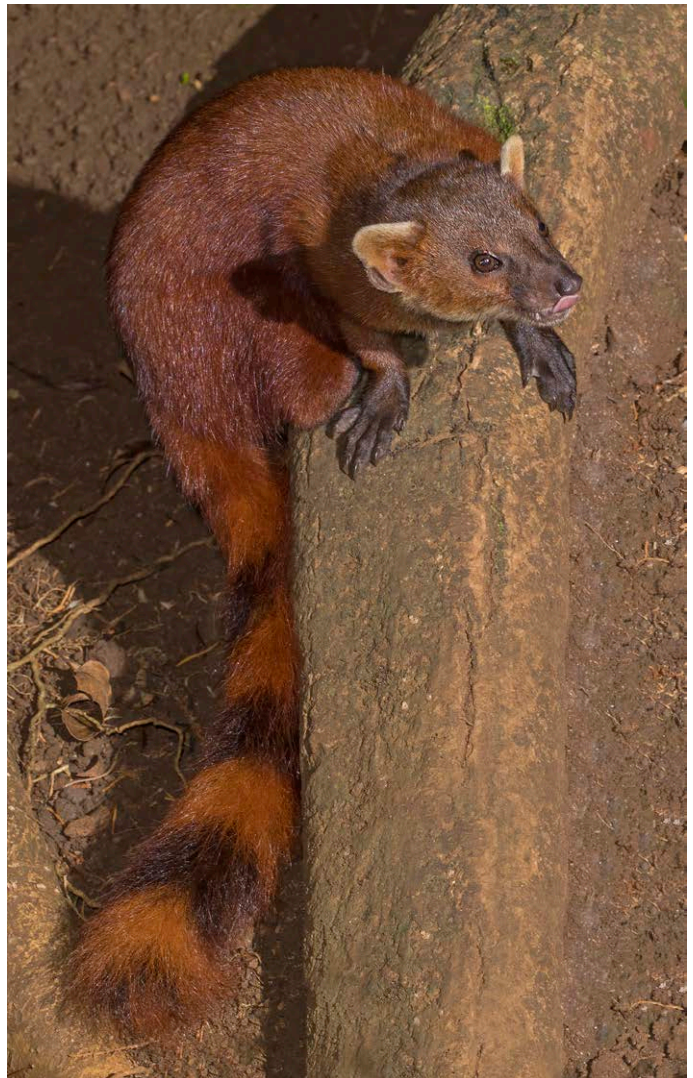


Giant pill millipede (*Sphaerotheriida* sp.)
Ankarana Reserve, Madagascar
Canon EOS 80D, 400mm, 1/640 sec, F10, ISO 800

Tip #68 Go to picnic spots

I am sure we'd all agree that feeding wild animals is a bad thing. But we know that many people do and that it changes animal behaviour. Animals become habituated and are easier to photograph. Should we stay away? That depends. Usually it's OK. Once an animal has seen a human being and hasn't been shot at, the habituation process has started and is irreversible.

In some places, the locals feed animals to attract tourists and then it can be exploitative. In Madagascar, there are not so many tourists, particularly in the north, but the ring-tailed vontsira (still known locally as a mongoose) doesn't waste any time in trying to steal your picnic.



Ring-tailed vontsira (*Galidia elegans*)
Montagne d'Ambre National Park, Madagascar, December 2018
Canon EOS 80D, 100mm, 1/250 sec, F11, ISO 200

Tip #69 Learn about species variety

It is tempting, once you have nailed a good shot, to ignore the next similar animal. But do you know enough about the animal to ignore it? Was it male, female, or a juvenile. It is not practicable to go out armed with a detailed field guide for every animal you might encounter but, once you have one photograph, it is worth checking what you've got as soon as you can. In Madagascar, you may not be able to get a good internet connection every day.

Every part of the island has endemic species and your guide should know the common lemurs and chameleons. He (all our guides were he) may not know that there are some animals where the scientists still haven't got around to doing the necessary research.

The taxonomy of Madagascar's chameleons and frogs is incomplete. The panther chameleon is one example. There are very obvious colour differences between animals in one patch of forest compared with one a mere hundred kilometres away. There is no agreement yet on whether each is a separate species, a distinct subspecies, a morph or just a colour form. If you are a photographic 'collector', you'd best photograph as many as you can.



Panther chameleon (*Furcifer pardalis*, *Joffreville locale*) male
Montagne d'Ambre National Park, Madagascar, December 2018
Canon EOS 80D, 263mm, 1/250 sec, F8, ISO 200
On-camera and off-camera flash

“ *photograph as many
as you can* ”



Panther chameleon (*Furcifer pardalis*, *Joffreville locale*) male, Montagne d'Ambre, Madagascar, December 2018
Canon EOS 80D, 153mm, 1/640 sec, F13, ISO 400

Species variety: photo on next page

Nosy Be panther chameleon (*Furcifer pardalis*) male
Lokobe Strict Reserve, Nosy Be, Madagascar, December 2018
Canon EOS 80D, 142mm, 1/250 sec, F11, ISO 400





Animal Magic

There are many unidentified stick insects in Madagascar that demonstrate plant mimicry - the mimicry of plants for disguise.



Walking stick insect (*Phasmatodea* sp.) male
Isalo National Park, Madagascar, November 2018
Canon EOS 80D, 100mm, 1/320 sec, F8, ISO 200

Female spiny orb-weaver spiders have armoured bodies with hard spines. That's why they are also called crab or thorn spiders. Size is about 10mm.



Spiny orb-weaver spider (*Gasteracantha versicolor formosa*)
female, Andasibe, Madagascar, November 2018
Canon EOS 80D, 400mm, 1/250 sec, F11, ISO 200

Tip #70 Complete the set

One of my favourite African birds is the malachite kingfisher. I photograph it whenever I can. During my trips to Ethiopia, Kenya, Namibia and The Gambia I have photographed the three main subspecies.

The Malagasy (or Madagascar malachite) kingfisher is a very close relation. So have I got the complete set? Unfortunately not, as there are two subspecies on the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe off the Western Coast of Africa. They are still on my to-be-visited list.

Tip #71 Learn fieldcraft

Some photographers don full camouflage gear and crawl towards their prey like an elite SAS soldier. Others bring hides and sit patiently for hours. They make fishing in a gravel pit seem like an extreme sport. For me, wildlife photography has to be part 'work', part holiday and I prefer to be with my wife. She has amazing forbearance, but there are limits. Anyway, it's just not practicable to get a new wife for every trip is it?

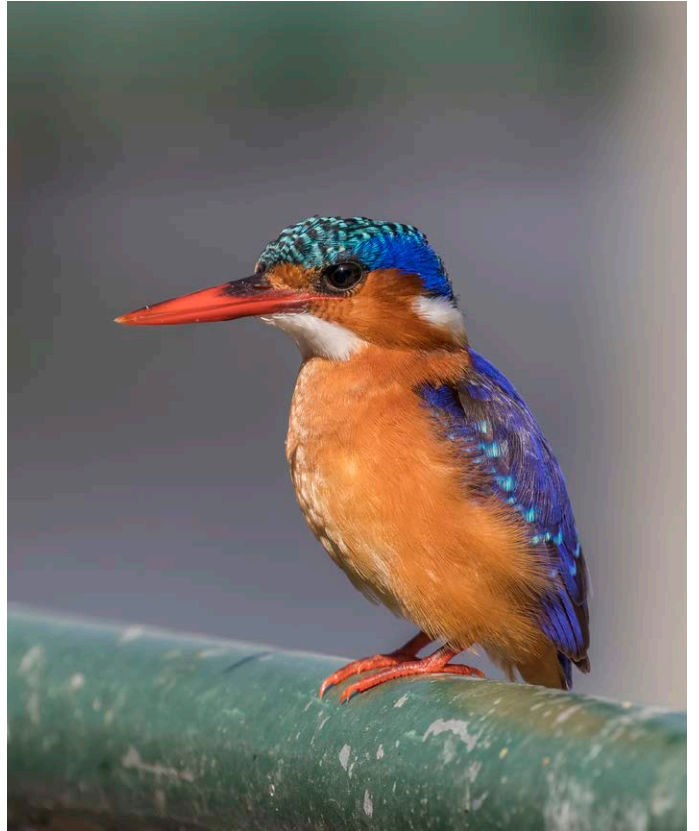
All animals have a fear circle or flight distance. Get too close and you scare them. Scaring animals can be a really bad thing to do and you must be considerate. If I spot a malachite kingfisher I will get close enough for a reasonable shot. But I want a better one. I will watch its behaviour. Is it fishing and returning to the same perch? Noise from snapping twigs triggers mammal flight, but birds less so. But as you try to get closer, I crouch down, use cover, wander sideways, move when it is looking away, don't look at it. When it flies off to fish, I've got a few seconds to steal forward into a better position. Think *Grandmother's Footsteps*.

We are less threatening in a vehicle. Boats are great for kingfisher shots and, given the choice, I choose a private boat with an electric motor and a guide who's happy to reposition the boat following my hand signals. We'll stop, take a couple of photos, then get closer and take some more. If we're on a river, then we'll go upstream and drift down towards the bird.

Every animal is different and fieldcraft learning never ends.



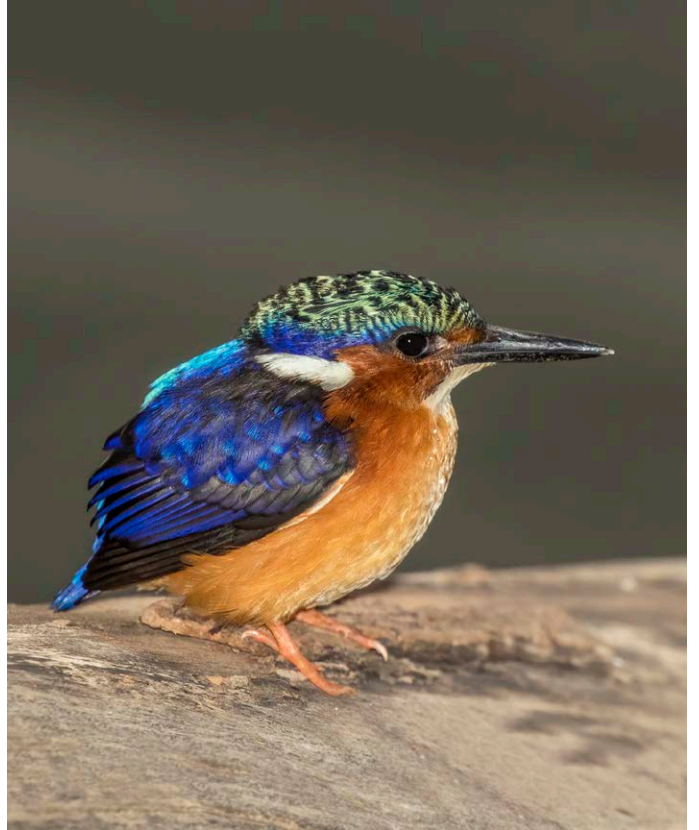
Malachite kingfisher (*Corythornis cristata galerita*)
Makasutu, The Gambia, December 2016
Canon EOS 70D, 1/1000 sec, F7.1, ISO 640



Malachite kingfisher (*Corythornis cristatus stuartkeithi*)
Lake Awassa, Ethiopia, December 2016
Canon EOS 80D, 560mm, 1,250 sec, F8, ISO 400



Malachite kingfisher (*Corythornis cristatus cristatus*)
Okavango River, Namibia, March 2018
Canon EOS 80D, 560mm, 1/800 sec, F8, ISO 800



Madagascar malachite kingfisher (*Corythornis vintsioides*)
Parc de Tsarasotra, Antananarivo, Madagascar, November 2018
Canon EOS 80D, 560mm, 1/250 sec, F8, ISO 800

Tip #72

Walk slowly

I find that guides who are used to guiding birdwatchers (that's most guides) walk quite fast. If you want to spot reptiles, amphibians, insects and spiders then you need to amble. You won't get as far, but you will find more stuff. If the sign says the circular walk is one hour. That's at least two hours. Going out with birdwatchers is not a good plan. To be honest, going out in a group is not a good plan unless they want to help you find the little stuff.

My technique on a forest path is to walk quickly through the shady bits then stop in a sunny spot. Or near water. I stand still and look around. I find it takes my eyes half a minute to adjust.

At night I use a head torch. If there are spiders, I may see the reflections in their eyes.

“ *going out in a group is not a good plan* ”

I just wish the world was twice as big and half of it was still unexplored

Sir David Attenborough
(1926–)



Labyrinth spider (*Agelena labyrinthica*) female in web funnel
Blankaart Nature Reserve, Diksmuide, Belgium. July 2020
Canon EOS 80D, 100mm, 1/640 sec, F7.1, ISO 500. Focus-stacked from 17 images



Crab spider (*Misumena vatia*) female with prey, silver-spotted skipper (*Hesperia comma*)
on *Centaurea jacea* flower, Bükk National Park, Hungary, August 2019
Canon EOS 80D, 100mm, 1/1000 sec, F10, ISO 500. Focus-stacked from 8 images



Malagasy green lynx spider (*Peucetia lucasi*) with prey, green bottle fly (*Lucilia* sp.)
VOIMMA reserve, Andasibe, Madagascar. November 2018
Canon EOS 80D, 100mm, 1/250 sec, F11, ISO 200, with flash



Wandering spider (*Cupiennius getazi*) with prey, female katydid (*Tettigoniidae* sp.)
Anton Valley, Panama, May 2019
Canon EOS 80D, 1/160 sec, F5, ISO 250, with on- and off-camera flash

Tip #73 Overcome your fear of snakes

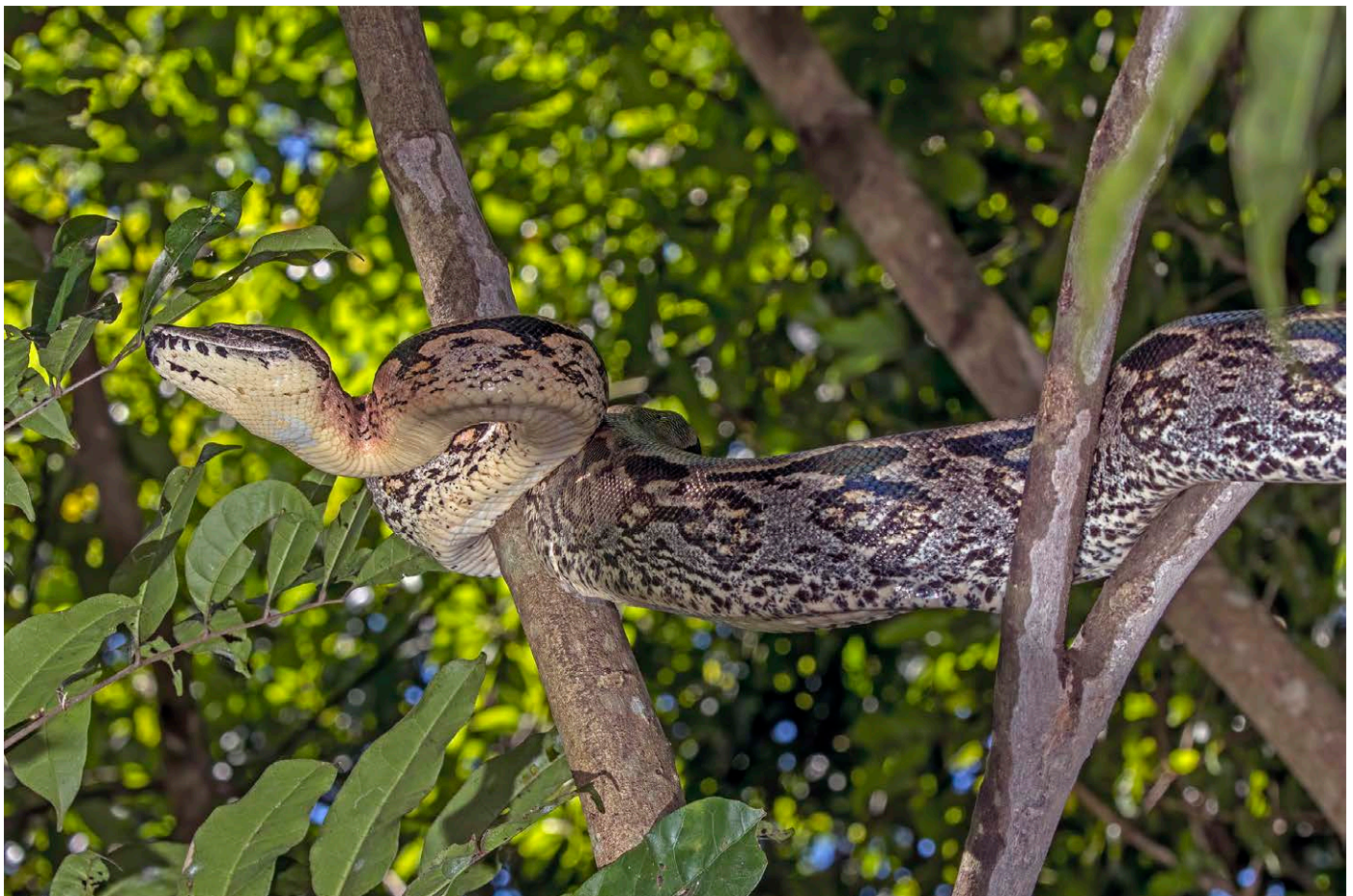
Now get vertigo just from looking at a cliff-edge photo in a magazine. Some people who suffer from ophidiophobia (an extreme fear of snakes) can have panic attacks from looking at pictures or even drawings of snakes. There are some very nasty snakes in the world, so as a photographer, it helps to know what you're up against before you get too close.

Boas can bite, but they are non-venomous snakes. They have no reason to approach you. As you wander through Madagascar's forests, it's reassuring to know that there are no pythons, cobras, mambas or vipers on the island.

Nevertheless, I hope you will agree how amazingly brave I was using a 107mm focal length to take the photo of the 3m long ground boa in the tree! The ground boa is the one in the tree and the tree boa is the one on the ground. Don't ask me why.



Madagascar tree boa (*Sanzinia madagascariensis*)
Peyrieras Nature Reserve, Madagascar, November 2018
Canon EOS 80D, 280mm, 1/640 sec, F7.1, ISO 800



Madagascar ground boa (*Acrantophis madagascariensis*), Lokobe Strict Reserve, Madagascar, December 2018
Canon EOS 80D, 107mm, 1/250 sec, F11, ISO 400, with flash

Tip #74 Engage with the experts

With insects, the printed and online field guides cannot always provide the answers. Most of the time we can rely on colours and tell-tale markings. A butterfly's wing shape can be diagnostic as can vein patterns and wing-spots. We compare our photo with a reference 'master'. If there is one. The duller the insect, the more difficult the identification. You need quality photos that show all the insect (topside and underside) and a real expert.

For Madagascar's butterflies and moths, I had the help of Dr David Lees from the Natural History Museum in London. In 2016, David published a paper that described the 19 new species of *Heteropsis* butterflies he and his colleagues had discovered in Madagascar. He has been kind enough to confirm that I had photographed a male and female of one of his new species.

For Madagascar's dragonflies and damselflies, you have to talk to KD. Klaas-Douwe Dijkstra is with the Naturalis Biodiversity Center, Leiden, in the Netherlands. He is also a member of the IUCN Species Survival Commission. His ground-breaking book on Madagascar's *Odonata* is almost ready for publication and he was generous enough to share it with me.

There are many ways you can get expert advice. The iNaturalist website is popular, but you cannot be sure the identity is reliable until you've validated the expertise of the 'expert'. I load my unidentified species onto Flickr. Flickr used to be free, but unfortunately you



Heteropsis avaratra (Lees & Kremen, 2016) male
Identified by Dr David Lees
Montagne d'Ambre National Park, Madagascar, December 2018.
Canon EOS 80D, 100mm, 1/250 sec, F8, ISO 640, with flash

have to pay now if you have more than 1,000 photos.

My photos from Trinidad and Tobago from 2014 have been on the site for several years. Last month, someone suggested ids for three of my unidentified butterflies and offered different species names for a significant number of others. Who was this Matthew Cock? Google soon explained that Dr Cock is Chief Scientist at CABI in Oxfordshire (the former Commonwealth Agricultural Bureaux) and an expert in the *Lepidoptera* of Trinidad and Tobago. My photograph of the Osca skipper turns out to be the first record of the butterfly on Tobago since 1932. Thank you.



Orthetrum azureum, Anja Community Reserve, Madagascar
Canon EOS 80D, 400mm, 1/640 sec, F5.6, ISO 800



Osca skipper butterfly (*Rhinthon cubana osca*), Tobago
Canon EOS 70D, 390mm, 1/640 sec, F9, ISO 1000

Tip #75

Look for the weirdest creatures

There are lots of weird animals in Madagascar and the leaf-tailed geckos are among the most fantastic. The smallest of the genus, the satanic leaf-tailed gecko, has the scientific name of *Uroplatus phantasticus* – although phantasticus actually means imaginery. It is 90mm long, including its tail, half the size of the *Uroplatus* species hiding on page 30. It has a tail that mimics a rotting leaf and the ‘leaf’ has chunks out of it for extra realism. It has a spur above its eyes that makes it look even less like an animal. It has leaf-like ribs and patterns on its body.

The gecko is a night hunter, so has developed its camouflage for sleeping and hiding during the day. When our guide spotted this one shortly after 6pm, he made us try and find it. It wasn't easy. Some hang from branches, but this one was curled up under a branch. It was the only one we saw. After the first photo (top left), it didn't stay long. The photo on the facing page was three seconds after the first.

The best exposure is the one that works

Charles H. Traub
(1945–)

Photographer and educator



Satanic leaf-tailed gecko (*Uroplatus phantasticus*)
Ranomafana National Park, Madagascar, November 2018
Canon EOS 80D, 1/250 sec, F22, ISO 400 with flash
490mm (top), 318mm (bottom), 189mm (facing page)





Groan Animals

Early on in his career, Billy was up on his hind legs telling jokes. He was the first stand up chameleon



Billy kept his sense of humour even when he began to suffer from a reptile dysfunction. At one gig, he saw a guy chatting up a cheetah, so asked him, 'Are you trying to pull a fast one?'



top
Flap-necked chameleon (*Chamaeleo dilepis*) female
iSimangaliso, Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa
Canon 450D, 100mm, 1/1000, F10, ISO 400

bottom
Cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*) female after chase
Phinda Private Game Reserve, South Africa
Canon EOS 70D, 120mm, 1/1000 sec, F7.1, ISO 800

Tip #76

Find a natural frame

In the African savannah, you can usually compose a shot that isolates a mammal from its surroundings. This is not so easy in a forest. In Madagascar, most of the lemurs live in the forests. For a typical sighting, there will be a branch where you don't want it. If you wait for a better opportunity, you know that the animal is going to move further up into the trees. That is a nightmare as we don't like to use powerful flash on mammals.

You can make use of the forest by using the tree trunk and branches as a natural frame. This will often be a close-up and will not show the whole animal. When you include the lemur's tail, it is more difficult to make the animal stand out from the background (see page 5).

Tip #77

Use off-camera fill-in flash

Lighting on bright sunny days can be harsh. In the forest, you get patches of sunlight and deep shadows. We don't let off full-strength direct flash in the faces of diurnal (daytime-active) mammals, but an off-camera (off-axis) flash can still help if you use it responsibly.

Flash used to brighten shadows is called fill or fill-in flash. It is particularly useful for backlit animals in trees. It means you can keep the ISO to a maximum of ISO 800. Sometimes you can position the flash above your head (getting downward light) but holding it at arms-length at the side works well too. My wife is now an experienced interactive flash-mount and will move around to make sure that the flash itself doesn't throw shadows.

Automatic flash settings are no use. They are far too bright and dazzle the animal, even with a diffuser. I start with 1/4 power and High-Speed Sync to get 1/250 sec exposure time. This is vital if you have to hold the camera in one hand and the flash in another. I also make the on-camera flash fire with flash exposure compensation typically -3EV. I do not use HDR with wildlife.



EN

Ring-tailed lemur (*Lemur catta*), Anja Community Reserve, Madagascar, November 2018
Canon EOS 80D, 188mm, 1/250 sec, F5, ISO 800, off-camera fill-in flash



CR

Nosy Be (Claire's) mouse lemur (*Microcebus mambiratra*)
Lokobe Strict Reserve, Nosy Be, Madagascar, December 2018
Canon EOS 80D, 153mm, 1/250 sec, F8, ISO 400, with flash



EN

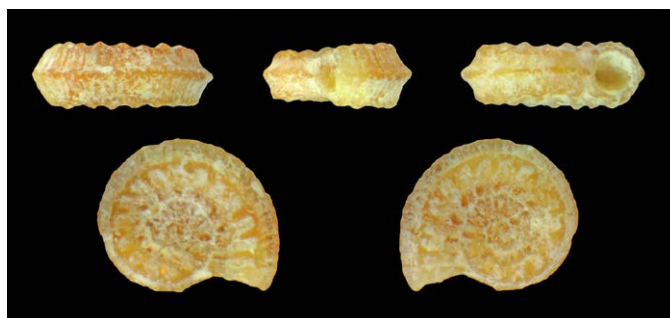
Crowned lemur (*Eulemur coronatus*) female
Ankarana Reserve, Madagascar, December 2018
Canon EOS 80D, 120mm, 1/250 sec, F13, ISO 800, fill flash

Meet Wikipedia contributors

B iologist Dr Herbert Zell (Wikipedia User:Llez) worked on molluscs and nematodes at the Natural History Museum in Karlsruhe, Germany in the 1970s. When he moved to the pharmaceutical industry, shells remained his hobby. Friends bring him shells and he also buys and exchanges shells with other collectors.

Herbert typically uses a Canon 500D with a 60mm Tamron macro lens with 2x or 4x front lenses if needed. Illumination is by LED lamps in a light box. For shells below 6mm, he uses a Hertel & Reuss binocular microscope with a UCMOS 14000KPA camera connected directly to his computer. All images are focus-stacked from 12-20 images.

The pink shell was the home of a sea snail from Madagascar with the apt name of the strawberry top snail. The yellow shell from Mauritius has a diameter of less than 1mm. We are lucky that a private collector shares his amazing free-licence images with us.



Sea snail (*Ammonicera binodosa*) shell, Mauritius. Diameter 0.7mm
UCMOS 14000KPA, Hertel & Reuss microscope, 1.58 sec
Photograph Herbert Zell. 5 focus-stacked images of the same shell

P ublic bodies also share their collections online. Project Phœbus is a scientific dissemination venture from the Natural History Museum of Toulouse in France (MHNT) and Wikipedia. Project Phœbus was started in 2009 by Dr Didier Descouens (Wikipedia User:Archaeodontosaurus), ENT doctor, naturalist, chair of the Institute of Natural Sciences in Toulouse since 1992 and Chevalier of France's Order of Merit.



Sea snail (*Clanculus puniceus*), Madagascar. Diameter 2cm
Canon EOS 500D, 60mm, 1/8 sec, F11, ISO 100. Photograph Herbert Zell. Five focus-stacked images of the same shell

The Hercules beetle is the world's largest rhino beetle and, counting the horn, is the longest beetle in the world. This male is 15cm long. They grow up to 17.5cm. The Madagascan sunset moth is one of the world's most impressive day-flying moths. The expert who first described it in 1773 classified it as a swallow-tail butterfly. It was later discovered that the person

who had collected the specimen had substituted the head and clubbed antennae of a butterfly. The moth is a Madagascar endemic and I've never seen it because we have been on the island at the wrong time of year. This sort of high quality reference image of specimens in good unfaded condition is invaluable to wildlife photographers.



Hercules beetle (*Dynastes hercules ecuatorianus*), Peru
Sony Alpha 850. Photograph Didier Descouens (MHNT). Focus-stacked image of specimen



Madagascan sunset moth (*Chrysidia rhipheus*), Masoala Peninsula, Madagascar
Photograph Didier Descouens (MHNT). Focus-stacked image of specimen

Tip #78

Play hide and seek

The mossy leaf-tailed gecko is a master of disguise. It hunts at night and sleeps by day and has developed an amazing camouflage system. It has irregular flaps of skin (known as a dermal flap) that run along its body so that it can press itself against a tree branch or trunk and disappear. The flaps mean that it doesn't throw a shadow. It is also polymorphic, so it changes colour to match the bark, moss and lichens on the wood.

OFFICER:

'I didn't see you at camouflage training this morning, Smithers.'

PRIVATE:

'Thank you, sir.'



Mossy leaf-tailed gecko (*Uroplatus sikorae*)
Montagne d'Ambre National Park, Madagascar, December 2018
Canon EOS 80D, 170mm, 1/250 sec, F5, ISO 500.
On-camera and off-camera flash



Animal Magic

At about 30mm, this *Brookesia* leaf chameleon was the smallest in the world until 2012. The new record-holder is about 1mm smaller.



Montagne d'Ambre leaf chameleon (*Brookesia tuberculata*) on my finger, Montagne d'Ambre, Madagascar, December 2018
Canon EOS 80D, 100mm, 1/250 sec, F11, ISO 200

The bee hummingbird is the smallest bird in the world. It weighs about 2gm and has a length of about 55mm. It is endemic to Cuba.



Bee hummingbird (*Mellisuga helenae*) immature male Palpite, Near Playa Larga, Bay of Pigs, Cuba, February 2016
Canon EOS 70D, 400mm, 1/500 sec, F8, ISO 800

Tip #79

Learn ready, steady, go

There is a better chance of getting an action shot if you can interpret clues from animal behaviour. Most birds lean forward and flex their knees before take off. Nectaring butterflies may flip their wings open for a fraction of a second.

A chameleon focuses its eyes (which usually work independently), opens its mouth and extends its tongue to the front of its mouth before striking. It is tricky to pick up the clues side-on and I found it easier to get the action head-on. Unfortunately, there's not much opportunity to practice.

I use my monopod or other support when I'm waiting for far-away action. It stops my arms getting tired. For these chameleon shots, branches were in the way and I needed the flexibility you get from hand-holding. At 1/2000 sec, camera shake is not very important.

Tip #80

Have a post-processing routine

When you have a lot of images to process, it makes sense to have a routine. I start from RAW. I adjust white balance, reduce shadows and highlights and increase contrast to compensate. I may have to adjust exposure to get back to where I was or correct under/overexposure. At this stage, I will undertake any focus-stacking in Helicon Soft.

I put the JPGs through noise-reduction then sharpening in Topaz then load into Photoshop. I can layer mask the sharpened image over the denoised image if there are nasty sharpening artefacts. I may do a little more work on shadows and highlights than I can achieve in RAW. Then there may be other tweaks on tone, colour balance, gamma correction etc.

When I'm happy with the image I rotate it (e.g. for a wonky horizon) and crop. As I've discovered, there's a real danger in cropping too tight as different media demand different crops.



Oustalet's chameleon (*Furcifer oustaleti*) male, Anja Community Reserve, Madagascar, November 2018
Canon EOS 80D, 100mm, 1/2000 sec, F5, ISO 400



A special place...

Anjajavy

Madagascar

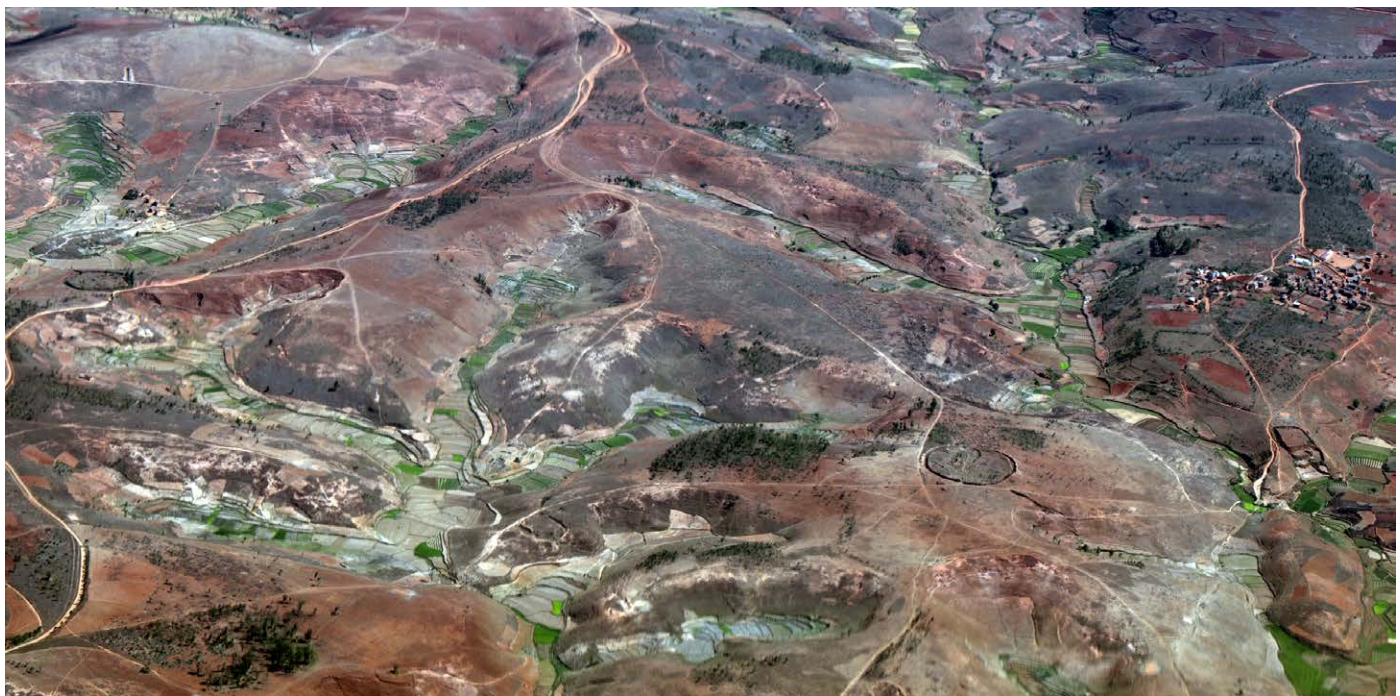


Coquerel's sifaka (*Propithecus coquereli*)
Anjajavy Private Reserve, Madagascar
Canon EOS 450D, 105mm, 1/200 sec, F5.6, ISO 400

Anjajavy is a private reserve in a region of deciduous dry forest on the north-west coast of Madagascar. You have to fly in from Tana, the capital. We went to Anjajavy Le Lodge on our first trip to the island. It offers a high level of accommodation and service. You can have a whole beach to yourself (with picnic lunch and hot water bush shower) if that's what you fancy. The lodge plays a significant role in the development of the local villages.

There are good numbers of coquerel's sifaka and common brown lemurs and a wide variety of birds, chameleons and other wildlife.

There could not be a greater contrast between the lush coastal forest and the irreversible denudation of the interior, where all the soil has washed away after 'slash and burn' deforestation.





Anjavy Le Lodge

Baobabs, Moramba Bay



A Sharp Eye on
wildlife
photography

Front cover

Ring-tailed lemur (*Lemur catta*)

Madagascar, November 2018

Canon EOS 80D, 321mm, 1/400 sec, F14, ISO 800

Back cover

Ring-tailed lemur (*Lemur catta*)

Madagascar, November 2018

Canon EOS 80D, 400mm, 1/400 sec, F22, ISO 800

