

PHOTO ARTS

September 2018

The Warmth that Threatens by Debarshi Das

Featuring
the winning Photo Stories from
our previous contest

The Roars that Tamed
the Tides: by Soumyajit Nandy

Sloth Bear the Misfit
who Thrived: by Praveen Siddannavar

Dear Readers

In this issue we have highlighted one of the most pressing issues concerning the health and future of this planet and every single species which inhabits this pice of landmass, we unravel the history of Global Warming and the perilious effects which climate change can have on the future of our planet. We have tried to uncover some of the secrets from the extremely elusive and enigmatic existence of one of the mightiest predators in the wild- the Royal Bengal tiger from the Sundarbans and how the fearsome reputation of this creature has elevated these mangroves to a mythical level. We bring you travel stories from some of the lesser explored places in the Himalayan kingdom of Sikkim. The suburban railway system which acts as a lifeline between Kolkata and the suburbs is an entity reflective of the myriad aspects of our everyday lives, in our photo feature we have tried to highlight some of them. The 47th Kolkata Rathyatra was a glitzy affair and a joyous occasion which embrassed all, find out more about this colourful affair. The sloth bear is an animal of strong will, at times stubborn at times, yet there was a time when even these creatures had to endure a painful past. Find out all these and much more in this September issue of our magazine. We sincerely hope this issue will unravel some of the lesser known aspects of the world and issues concerning it and will live up to your expectations.

Regards

Rahul Bera (Editor of Photography & Design)

Indian Photo Arts

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 Indian Photo ARTS

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cover page photograph by Debarshi Das

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 Indian Photo ARTS



Reader's Section

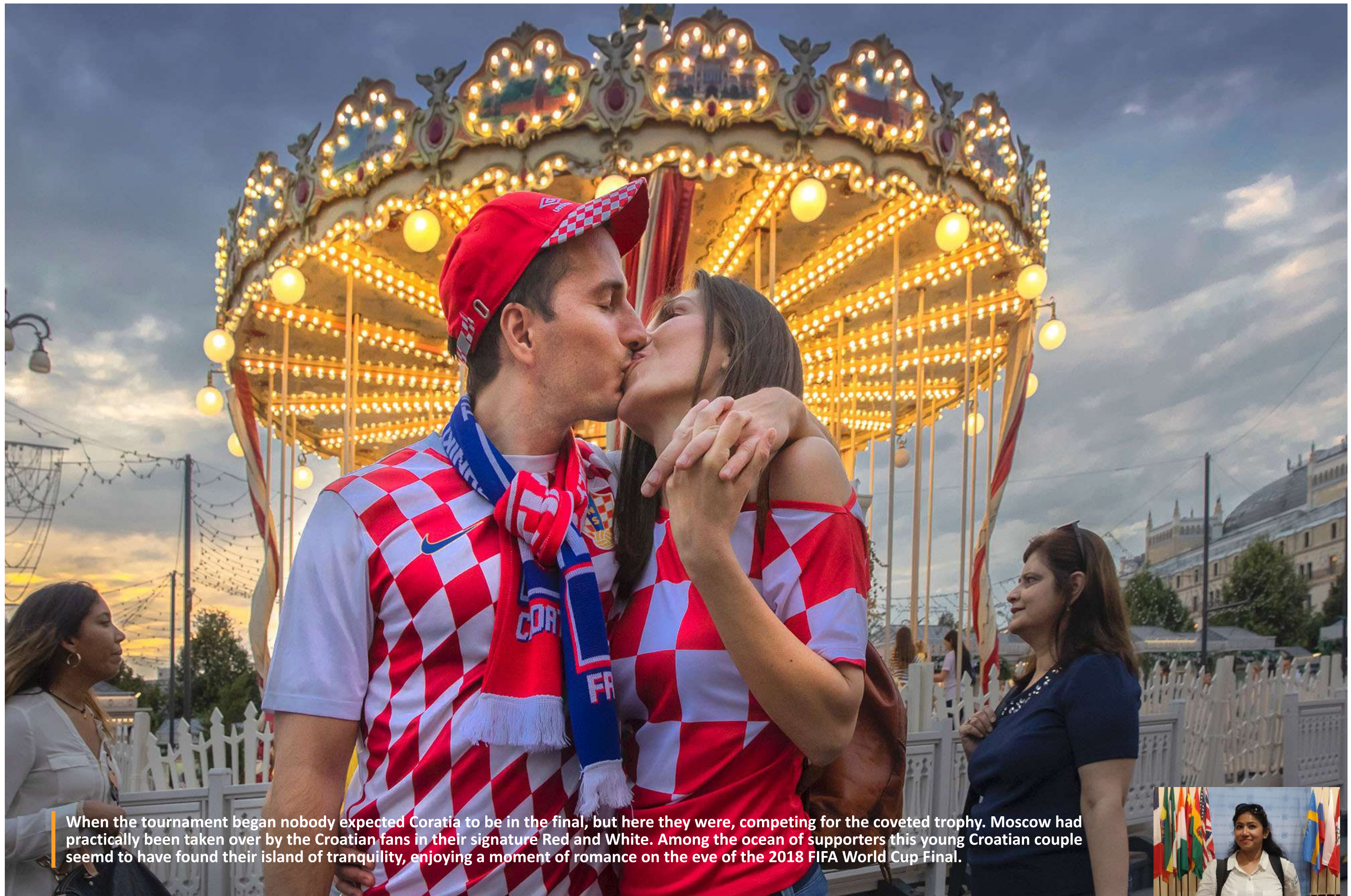
Featuring the best entries made by our readers.

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Tag your entries on instagram with [#ipamagazine](https://www.instagram.com/#ipamagazine) and give yourself a chance to get featured.

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When the tournament began nobody expected Croatia to be in the final, but here they were, competing for the coveted trophy. Moscow had practically been taken over by the Croatian fans in their signature Red and White. Among the ocean of supporters this young Croatian couple seemed to have found their island of tranquility, enjoying a moment of romance on the eve of the 2018 FIFA World Cup Final.



Photograph by Lopamudra Talukdar

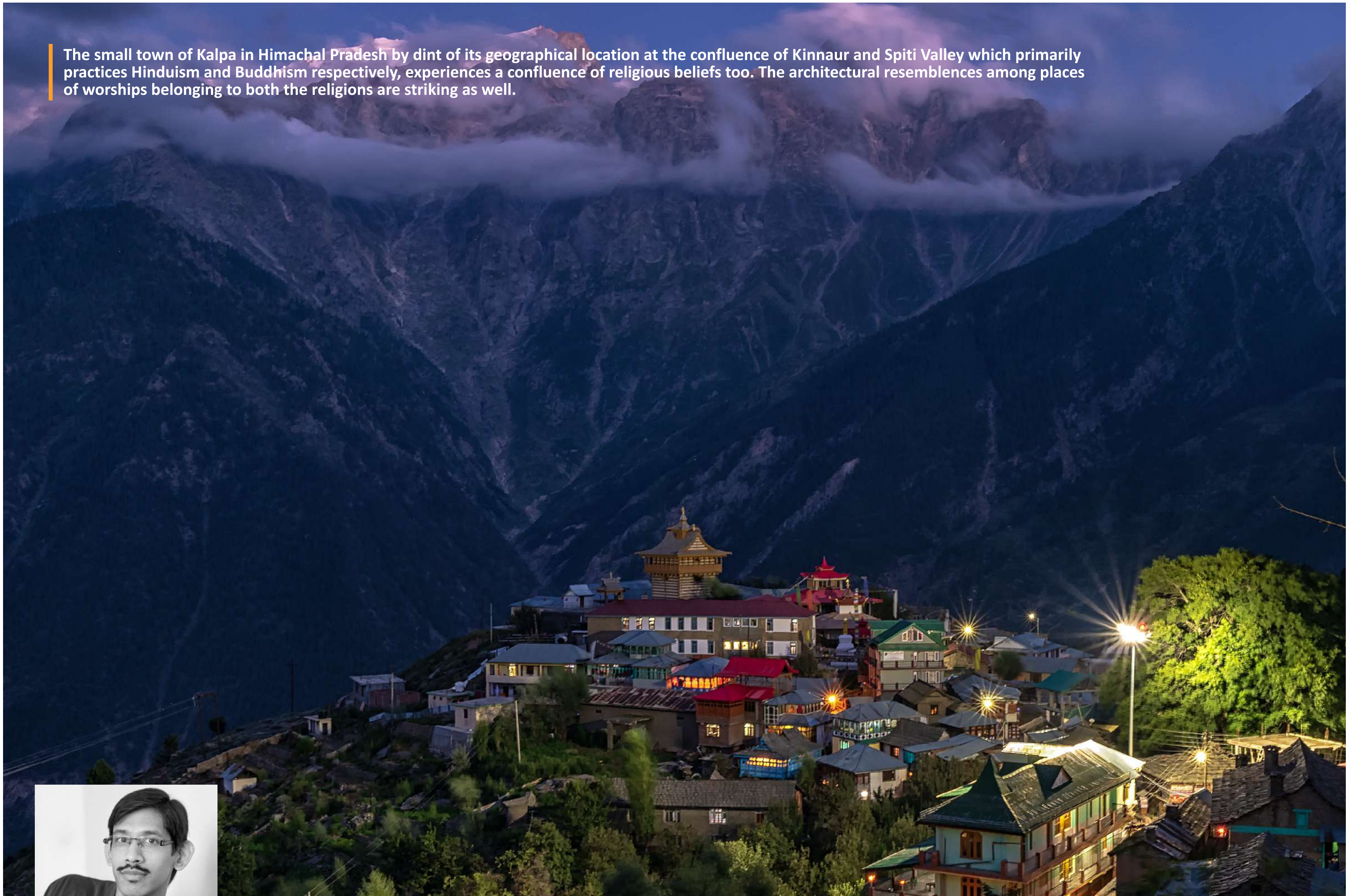


The annual festival of Chikal Kalo at Ponda in Goa is a celebration of one particular element of Mother Nature, the mud or the earth. The heavy downpour during the month of July creates such slushy grounds where people play with each other with mud. A young boy runs through a muddy patch flanked by others taking part in this festival.



Photograph by Dipen G Shah

The small town of Kalpa in Himachal Pradesh by dint of its geographical location at the confluence of Kinnaur and Spiti Valley which primarily practices Hinduism and Buddhism respectively, experiences a confluence of religious beliefs too. The architectural resemblances among places of worships belonging to both the religions are striking as well.



Photograph by Shrideep S Nanal

Blackbucks prefer thinly forested areas or open grasslands with regular access to water. The scrublands of Solapur in Maharashtra are ideal for these animals. Once widespread these antelopes are now restricted to such small corridors scattered across the country, the rapid loss of habitat and attacks by stray dogs contributing heavily to this decline. A pair of male and female blackbucks in Solapur, Maharashtra.



Photograph by Nitin Sidhpura

The North and South Block of the iconic Rashtrapati Bhavan, the official address of the President of India lies in the heart of the political edifice of India in New Delhi. This iconic structure was originally constructed as the Viceroy's official residence in the erstwhile British-India.



Photograph by Himanshu Joshi

The Warmth that Threatens

by Debarshi Das

The icy cold realms of the planet are facing a threat like never before. In the melting polar ice caps, the vanishing glaciers and the rising sea level lies the blueprint for this planet's destruction. We can reverse the course which leads to doom but we need to act fast and act right now.

Planet Earth is an ancient being, its origin approximately dates back to 4.5 billion years ago. During its relatively early days planet earth was a restless and dynamic entity, massive relentless upheavals such as continental shifts, countless volcanic eruptions, daily formations and recessions

of glaciers were all parts of a usual day on the earth's surface. The present day earth is a much tamed beast, which has successfully put to rest its once violent predisposition, yet one walk through the meandering lanes of time takes us back to the remnants of this once violent past, the

nostalgic nature of earth stills holds dear to its heart scattered artefacts from its once unstable past. There is one such element of nature which still stands proudly from this ancient past of the planet, a titanic force which shaped most of northern America and parts of Europe-the great

white ice walls of earth which still dominate much of Greenland, Iceland and the upper extremes of the continent of North America. The full extent of how this potent force of nature has carved and forever changed parts of earth's landscape are only evident in the annals of the Ice

Ages that are an integral part of earth's history. An ice age in simple terms can be described as a gradual and steady decline in earth's surface and atmospheric temperature resulting in the continual formation of ice on the earth's surface in the form of polar ice caps or sheets and even in the form of glacial expansion. In other words over a considerable period of time a vast majority of the earth's surface was covered in thick sheets of ice. It is believed in the history of earth at least 5 ice ages have occurred. Typically any ice age is characterised by long spells of extreme cold climate which are generally referred to as "glacial period" during which the earth experiences a steady decline in temperature and constant formation of ice in various forms all over the planet. In between two successive glacial periods there is a rise in temperature leading to the melting of the frozen ice, these intermittent warmer periods are classified as "interglacial periods". An interglacial period may very well be a basic part of an extended ice age punctuated by several glacial and interglacial periods. The occurrence of the earliest ice age can be traced back to approximately 2 billion years ago and the latest one to have occurred was 3 million years ago and is still very much prevalent on earth. Quite interestingly the present day earth is very much under the grip of the latest ice age which occurred 3 million years ago albeit for more than the previous 11,000 years or so earth is experiencing the interglacial

period of the youngest ice age to have occurred on this planet. The polar ice caps of today, the glaciers, the snow-capped mountain peaks all owe their origins to this fascinating phenomenon that the planet has experienced during various stages over the billions of years of its ancient existence.

The pugmarks of yesteryears' ice ages are evident in today's world in places where the landscape is still heavily dominated by snow and ice. The northern reaches of the continent of North America, places like Greenland, Iceland are meticulously sculpted in frozen ice. However it is not our newfound or existent obsession with ice ages which has thrust these places in the limelight for quite some time now, it is due to a reason of a very different kind, one which is possibly the biggest talking point world over-climate change. There is very little contention if none at all that the earth is progressively getting warmer, at an alarming rate a phenomenon which is quite commonly referred to as global warming. To break it down even further, scientists unanimously have pointed out the expansion of the greenhouse effect which is almost single-handedly bringing about such changes. Certain gases in the earth's atmosphere tend to be long-lived and absorb and emit radiant energy. In this context it would be wrong to sweepingly vilify every greenhouse gas, the truth is had it not been for these gases life on earth wouldn't have been at all possible. In the absence of the greenhouse gases earth's

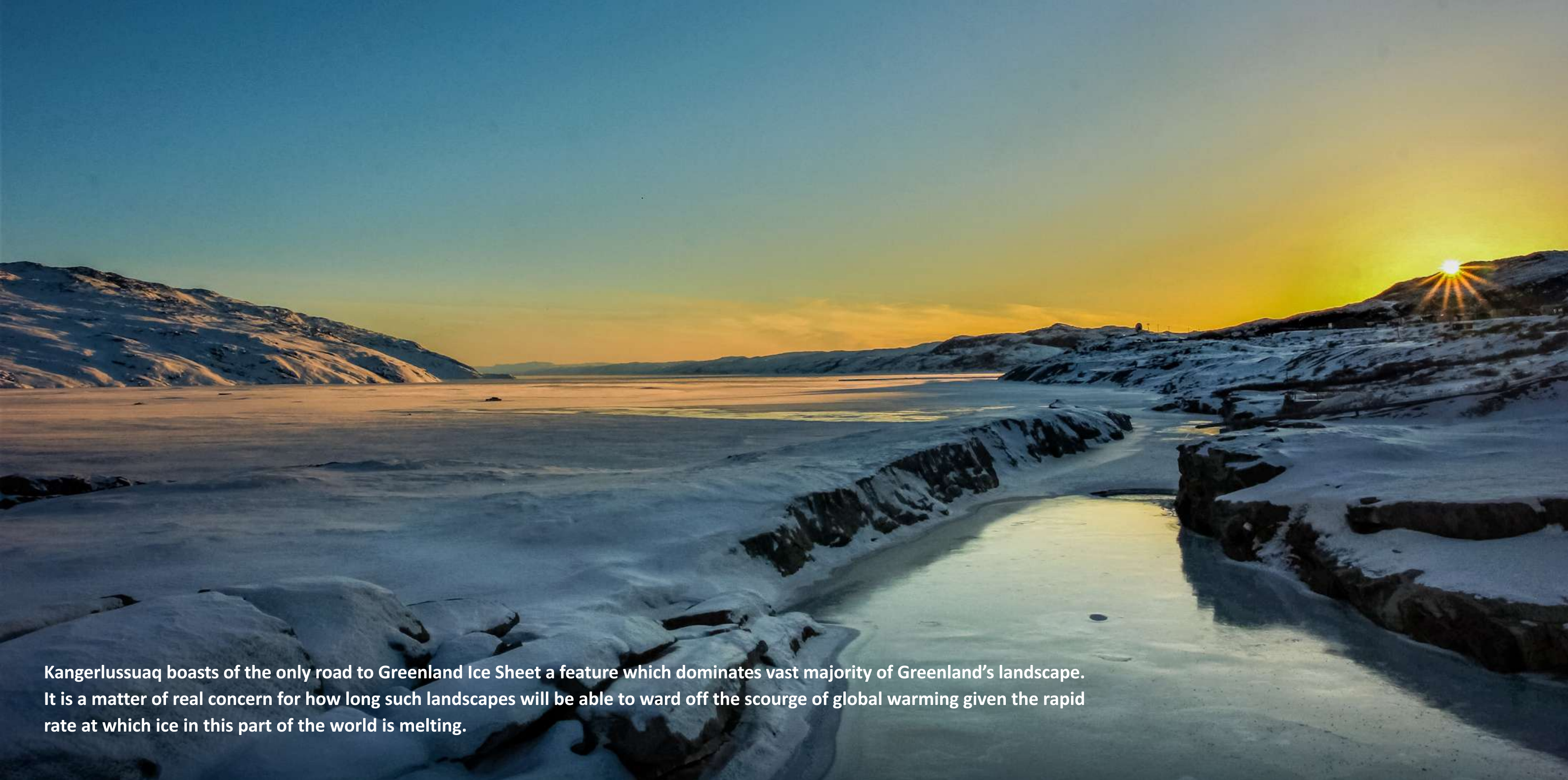
An increasing concentration of greenhouse gases has over thousands of years created a close knit thick blanket in the earth's atmosphere trapping the radiated heat instead of allowing it to disperse...

surface temperature would have gradually plummeted to -20 degree Celsius or even less, rendering it useless for sustaining life in general. However, the rising levels of greenhouse gases meant a gradual increase in earth's surface and atmospheric temperature. The greenhouse gases which have the ability to absorb heat, retain and radiate are water vapour, carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide and the CFCs or the chlorofluorocarbons. An increasing concentration of the greenhouse gases has over thousands of years created a close knit thick blanket in the earth's atmosphere trapping the radiated heat instead of allowing it to disperse into the space. This trapped heat has gradually created a furnace like situation in the earth's atmosphere gradually increasing the surface temperature of the planet. The natural cover provided by the greenhouse gases or the blanket referred to has been tampered with gradually, mainly by human induced activities through centuries as a result of which this blanket of gas kept on growing thicker and more concentrated allowing less and less radiated heat to escape through it. This trapped heat in turn has contributed in a steady manner in increasing the earth's temperature.

Through the course of human history, as our ancient civilizations progressed, our dependency towards technology and fossil

fuel kept on increasing. As we entered the modern era we became less and less dependent on manual labour and our reliance on automation kept on increasing. All of the modern day machines, the automobiles, the mega factories churning out colossal amounts of produce daily, the power sectors bringing electricity to our homes all feed off of fossil fuel. As a result of the ever increasing combustion of fossil fuel the concentration of atmospheric carbon dioxide has increased manifolds, making it the most prominent contributor towards the greenhouse effect. Methane and nitrous oxide too contribute their fair share albeit much less significant when compared to carbon dioxide through various human induced activities such as agricultural practices including the use of fertilizers, sewage and human waste, burning of biomass among others. The CFCs or chlorofluorocarbons amount to roughly 2% of the greenhouse gases which escape into the atmosphere through the use of coolants used in refrigerator, air conditioners even deodorants and other small and large scale industrial processes particularly related to preservation modes.

In the recent light of global warming and greenhouse effect the icy realms of the planet become more significant than they have ever been. From being relics of some ancient ice age which swept across the



Kangerlussuaq boasts of the only road to Greenland Ice Sheet a feature which dominates vast majority of Greenland's landscape. It is a matter of real concern for how long such landscapes will be able to ward off the scourge of global warming given the rapid rate at which ice in this part of the world is melting.

planet millions of years ago, these icy shields and sheet are the first ones to sound the alarm calls, giving away the tell-tale warning signs of the perils of global warming. With global warming, both of the poles are warming quite quickly, and this warming is causing ice to melt in both regions. When we think of ice melting, we may think of it melting from above,

as the ice is heated from the air, from sunlight, or from infrared energy from the atmosphere. But in reality, a lot of this melting occurs from down below and this becomes obvious in the Antarctic, which in itself is a gigantic mass of ice where ice shelves like giant mountains rise from the land and peep over the water. The bottom of the ice shelf is exposed to the

ocean. As the ocean warms up, the rising temperature slowly leads to chunks of ice from the edges of the submerged ice shelf or even the undersides to thin or break off into the ocean. For decades scientists and environmentalists have been predicting such developments and unfortunately such sorry developments are taking place at an unprecedented rate as well as scale, thereby

forcing everyone to sit up and take notice. The long term consequences of polar ice melting due to global warming can be devastating for this planet. Melting ice doesn't contribute significantly to the rising sea levels since it re-occupies the same volume of displaced water. However when ice from land makes its way into the ocean the entire narrative changes. Floating ice

shelves act as natural barriers to glaciers which can be thought of as flowing rivers of ice. This natural barrier prevents the glacial ice from flowing into the ocean. In the wake of melting floating ice, this barrier thins or almost entirely vanishes paving the way for glacial ice to merge with the ocean. Such movements of ice from land to ocean contribute greatly towards the steady rise of sea level globally. These disturbing trends are

breaking all previous records, for instance the area covered by Arctic ice in March, when the sea ice hits its largest extent, was documented to be at a record low in nearly 40 years of satellite documentation. Even the melting began early, with the spring melt beginning a month earlier. Greenland as well is no stranger to such phenomenon; a report by NASA suggested a huge percentage of coastal glaciers around Greenland are at the risk of a

meltdown at a much faster pace than anticipated previously. Even by a conservative estimate Greenland is losing an average of 260 billion tons of ice each year. In mid-September, a surge of warm air caused a spike in surface melting in southern Greenland—one of the largest spikes to occur in September since 1978. Many scientists fear at this rate some of the glaciers will disappear by the turn of this century and the melting ice of the

Arctic, primarily through the glaciers disappearing into the ocean, will contribute to almost a rise of 20-25 centimetres in the sea level. It will be impossible to deny a significant majority of this accelerated rise can be attributed to various factors leading up to man-made global warming. Unsurprisingly the findings reveal almost 60-70 percent of these causes are anthropogenic. Scientists for long have been predicting the man-made factors



The town of Ilulissat is a part of this frozen world in Greenland and is located barely 350 km north of the Arctic Circle. The perils of global warming and climate change are bound to affect places like these the first and the residents of these places are already suffering from the ill-effects of these evils. Quite aptly Ilulissat in Icelandic means Icebergs.

Life in this frozen realm is incredibly different and challenging from most parts on this planet. Yet life has not only found ways to sustain itself instead has thrived under the most adverse of situations.

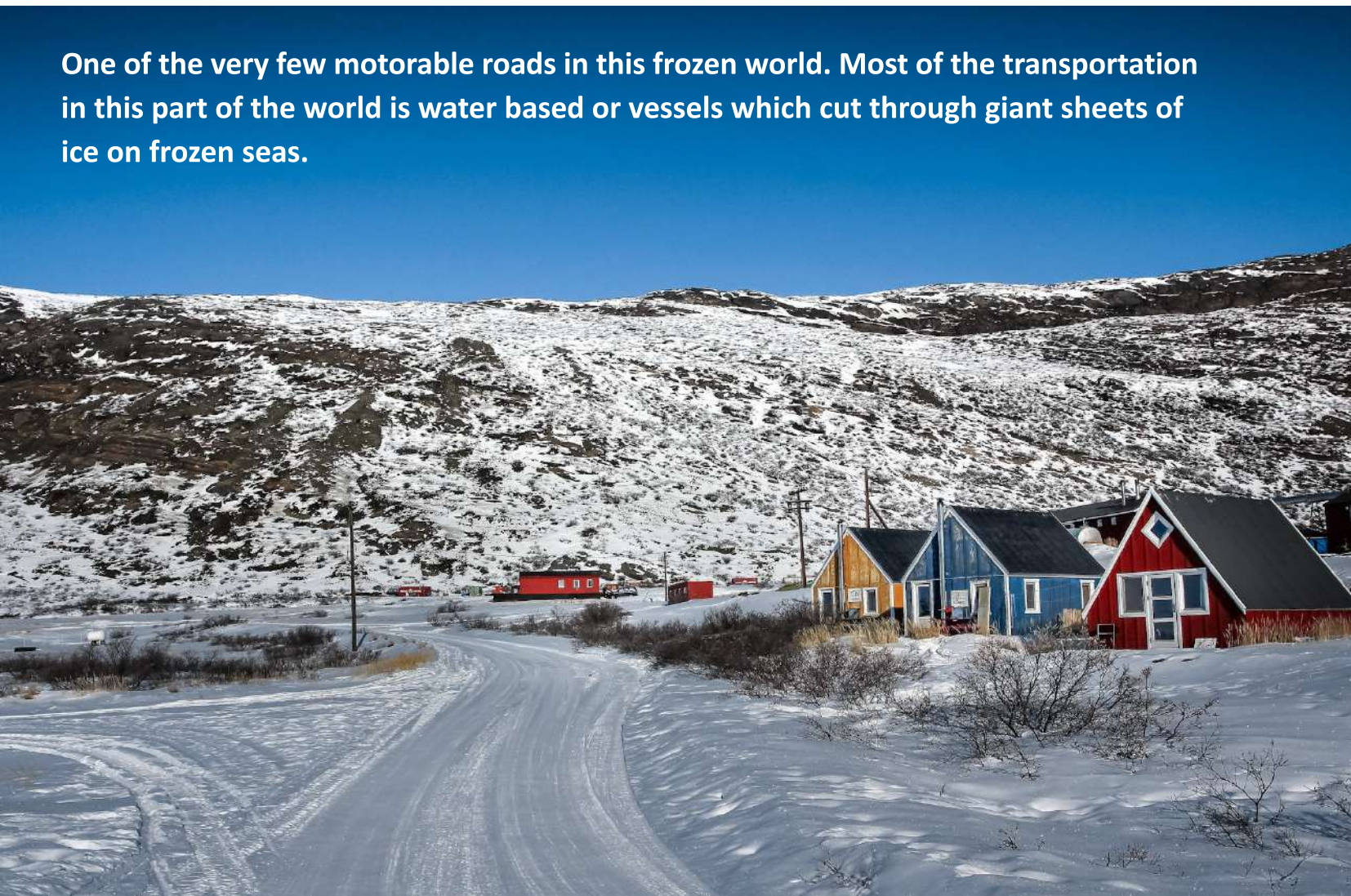


At times it is bound to defy all logic regarding how life could thrive in this barren freezing world.



Aurora Borealis is a common occurrence in the skies of the Arctic and is also referred to as "northern lights".

One of the very few motorable roads in this frozen world. Most of the transportation in this part of the world is water based or vessels which cut through giant sheets of ice on frozen seas.



(below) These giant walls of ice prevent the glaciers from flowing into the ocean, however in the wake of global warming these natural barriers are crumbling and they are crumbling fast.



Sub-zero temperatures, icy cold air and massive sheets and fjords of ice are the dominant features of this world.



which contribute significantly towards global warming have affected the Arctic the most. Compared to other places on the planet the Arctic is warming at least twice as fast. The satellites first started tracking the Arctic ice in 1979. Since then it has been observed approximately 13% of the ice has disappeared every decade in the Arctic. At this rate the entire Arctic could become ice free by the late 2030s. In fact many argue the inevitable could take place sooner than anticipated since the recent trends have by far outpaced all the rates

predicted by the computer generated models. Such changes have wreaked havoc on the lives of the people and animals who have called the Arctic their homes for centuries. Many communities who have lived in this snowscape for generations now are quite literally facing the heat. The fragile ecosystem is under severe threat as is evident from the recent predicaments to have taken over the life of one of the apex predators in this region- the polar bear. The gigantic polar bears contrary to the previous knowledge have a higher

metabolism, which means they should consume one adult ringed seal every 10-12 days in order to maintain their bodyweight. The polar bears rely heavily upon the floating sheets of ice for hunting. However as the sea ice keeps disappearing, the Arctic the polar bears find it extremely difficult to successfully hunt down their preys. This was obvious in some of the recent findings where the cause of death of a number of polar bears were attributed to starvation. The indigenous people in the Arctic are no better off. For generations

hunting has been a huge part of their lives, doubling up as an identity for them apart from being their principal livelihood. Ethnic groups in the Arctic region as principle means of livelihood for ages have indulged in hunting polar bears, walrus, seals and caribou, herding reindeer, fishing not only for food and other valuable resources available from the animals' body parts to support the local economy, but also as the basis for their cultural and social identity. However with the changing climate and vanishing ice sheets in the Arctic, these traditional food sources are scarce these days. The thinning ice sheets render hunting expeditions which often involve travelling for long distances over them incredibly dangerous. This in turn has significantly affected the economy of these small communities and even their health and well-being. In Finland, Norway and Sweden, changing patterns of rain and mild weather mostly during the winter season often prevent reindeer herds from accessing lichen, which is the most vital food source. This has resulted in severe depletion in the population of reindeer which are vital to the culture, subsistence and economy of Saami communities. As an alternative food source the herders have to feed their animals fodder, which during frozen winter months is harder to get hold of and is expensive, thereby rendering the traditional occupation of herding reindeer for this community a non-viable one. The varied ill effects of rising sea level in the Arctic due to climate change are not



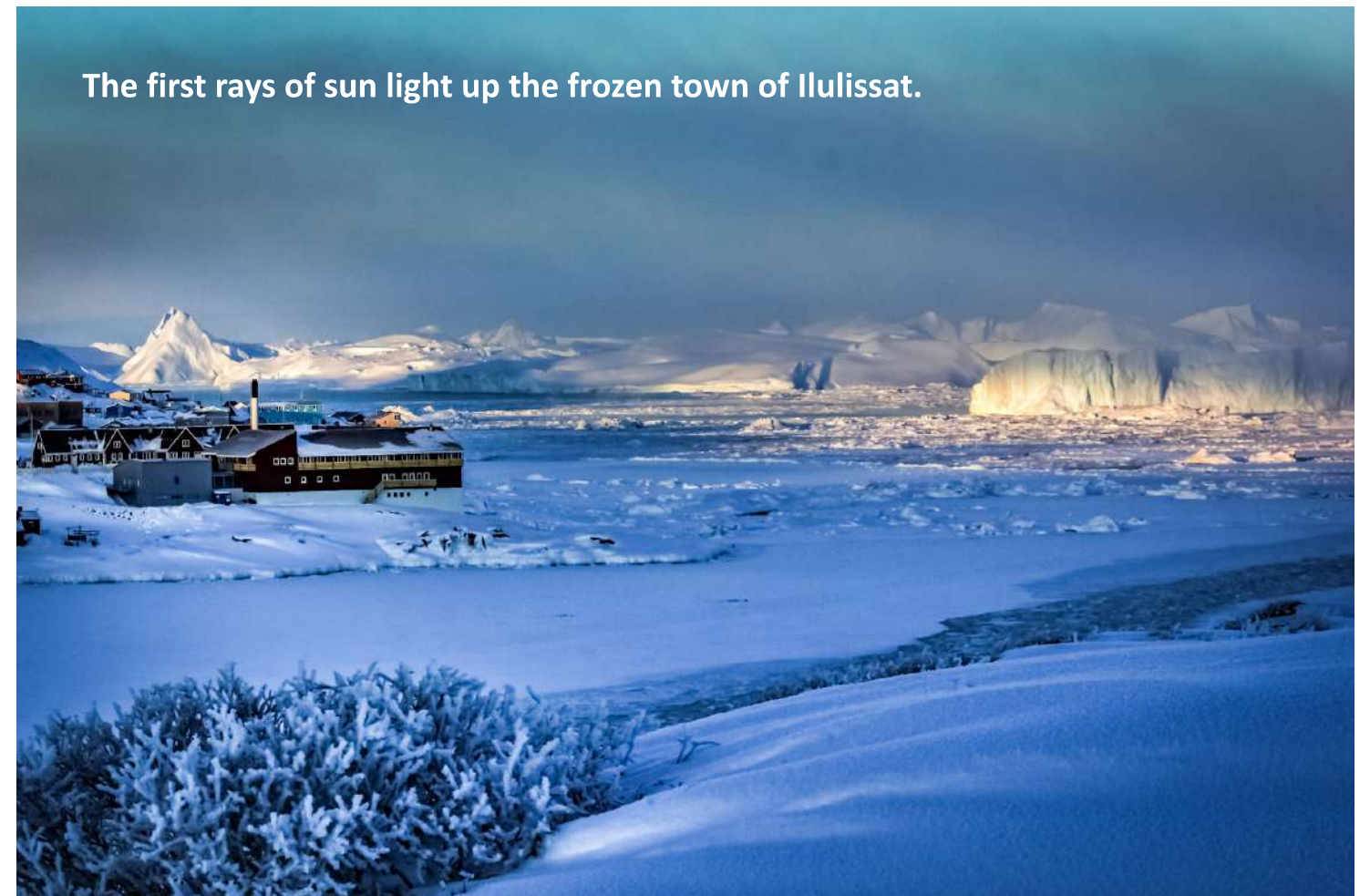
(above) The gradually vanishing ice from the polar ice caps highlights the perils of global warming and climate change like nothing else. Satellite images time and again reveal the shocking reality in comparison to the scenario 40 years ago.

restricted to the Arctic only; instead it spills over to all other parts of the planet. This is evident in the increased flooding in some of the places on this planet. The sea level is rising, at an accelerated rate, places or cities which are along the coasts or shores now face the much real threat of being engulfed by the rising sea water. The coastal regions across the world are experiencing an increasingly unpredictable weather system and even extreme weather conditions, particularly parts of North America and Europe which often manifest in the form of prolonged periods of heavy snow or rainfall, intense summer as well as winter months. This happens because

a warming Arctic disrupts the jet stream, a river of fast-moving wind high over our heads which is responsible for the weather patterns experienced in different parts of the planet. This stream of air is a result of the difference in temperature between the cold Arctic and the warmer mid-latitudes and the tropical regions. As the Arctic gets progressively warmer this temperature difference over time has slowly diminished resulting in a much weakened jet stream. A weakened jet stream may prevail over a particular place for longer than usual, which often leads to prolonged periods of incessant snow or rainfall or other extreme weather conditions. Rising temperatures



The wheels of life roll on overcoming these icy obstacles.



The first rays of sun light up the frozen town of Ilulissat.

in the Arctic are also causing frozen ground, called permafrost, to thaw in Alaska, Canada, and Siberia. Permafrost traps huge amount of greenhouse gas, it is estimated that the trapped carbon dioxide in the permafrost is as much as it is in the

atmosphere presently. A huge amount of methane too remains trapped in the permafrost. As a result of the thawing of permafrost greenhouse gases are leaking into the atmosphere and contributing further to global warming. If the permafrost

Sled dogs are still used extensively across Greenland and in parts of Alaska and northern Canada over landscapes such as this one where other modes of transport are rendered useless. These sturdy creatures haul anything from essential supplies to mails over never ending sheets of ice.

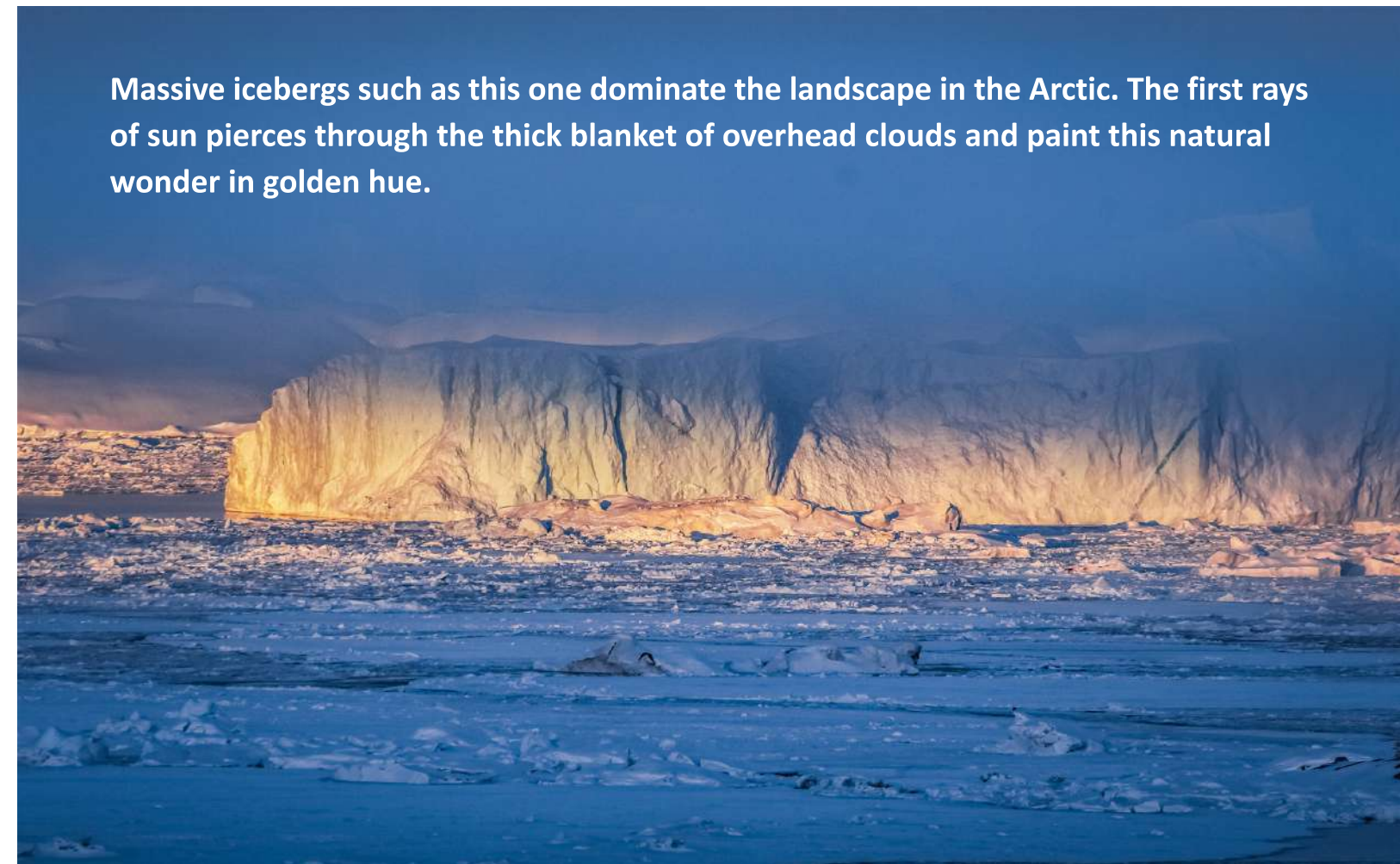


Floating ice shelves in the Arctic Ocean act as natural barriers against glacial ice from making its way to the ocean, however thinning ice shelves in the Arctic Ocean is allowing more glaciers to pour into seas and oceans.

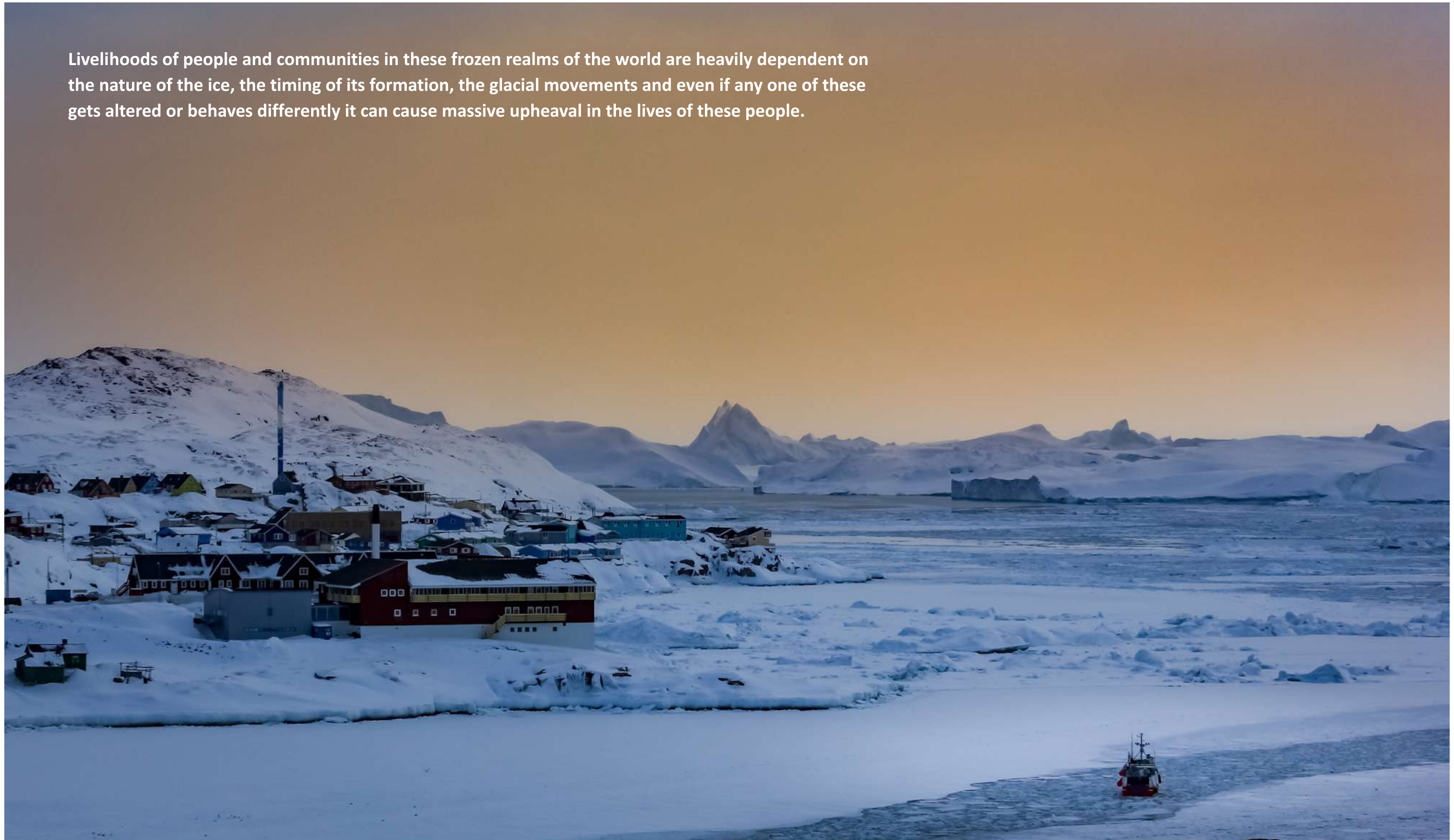
warms up, it can start releasing this carbon in the form of two powerful heat-trapping greenhouse gases, methane and carbon dioxide, making global warming worse. In light of such developments which have steadily taken place for the worse over the past few decades, the planet is possibly facing its worst crisis, a crisis which has the potential of wiping off vast swathes of landmasses, cities, towns, destroy thousands of acres of farmlands and cause unmitigated destruction in more ways than we can possibly imagine. There is only one way to ward off this evil-by reducing the carbon footprint on this planet. This is the job of every single individual on

this planet; each and every one of us can bring about small changes in reducing our carbon emissions without having to depend on anyone. The threat is so severe that to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change, countries adopted the Paris Agreement in Paris, which went into effect from the November of 2016. In the agreement, all countries agreed to work to limit global temperature rise to well below 2 degrees centigrade. As of April 2018, 175 parties had ratified the Paris Agreement and 10 developing countries had submitted their first iteration of their national adaptation plans for tackling the scourge of climate change. More and more

Massive icebergs such as this one dominate the landscape in the Arctic. The first rays of sun pierces through the thick blanket of overhead clouds and paint this natural wonder in golden hue.



Livelihoods of people and communities in these frozen realms of the world are heavily dependent on the nature of the ice, the timing of its formation, the glacial movements and even if any one of these gets altered or behaves differently it can cause massive upheaval in the lives of these people.





These giant ice shelves stand tall as silent sentinels maintaining the delicate natural order of this region but these icy structures are under severe threat like never before.

countries have either migrated to or are making serious attempts to shift to cleaner or renewable sources of energy. Stricter environmental laws and guidelines are being put into place with a view of not amplifying the prevalent threat of global warming. As individuals too we have a lot to contribute in tackling this menace. Smallest of actions such as using public mode of transport often, judicious and responsible use of electrical appliances,

recycling whenever we can, spreading awareness, can go a long way in reducing the carbon footprint on this planet. This is particularly applicable to developed nations where the means of leading a carbon free life are more and abundant compared to the developing nations. This planet is home to us all. Much of this

monster was created from our blueprint; hence the responsibility lies with us all. This planet is reeling under the pressure and expectations of our demands, our definition of luxuries is often synonymous with doom for this planet, the time is ripe for every one of us to introspect and figure out a way to heal the planet, for this is

where home is, and the home is under threat from the enemy of the worst kind, if we still fail to act together then someday we will lose the right to call this beautiful planet our home which paved the pathway for life, the most potent force of nature, we will forever lose life.

S *mallest of actions such as using public mode of transport often, judicious and responsible use of electrical appliances, recycling whenever we can, can go a long way in reducing the carbon footprint...*



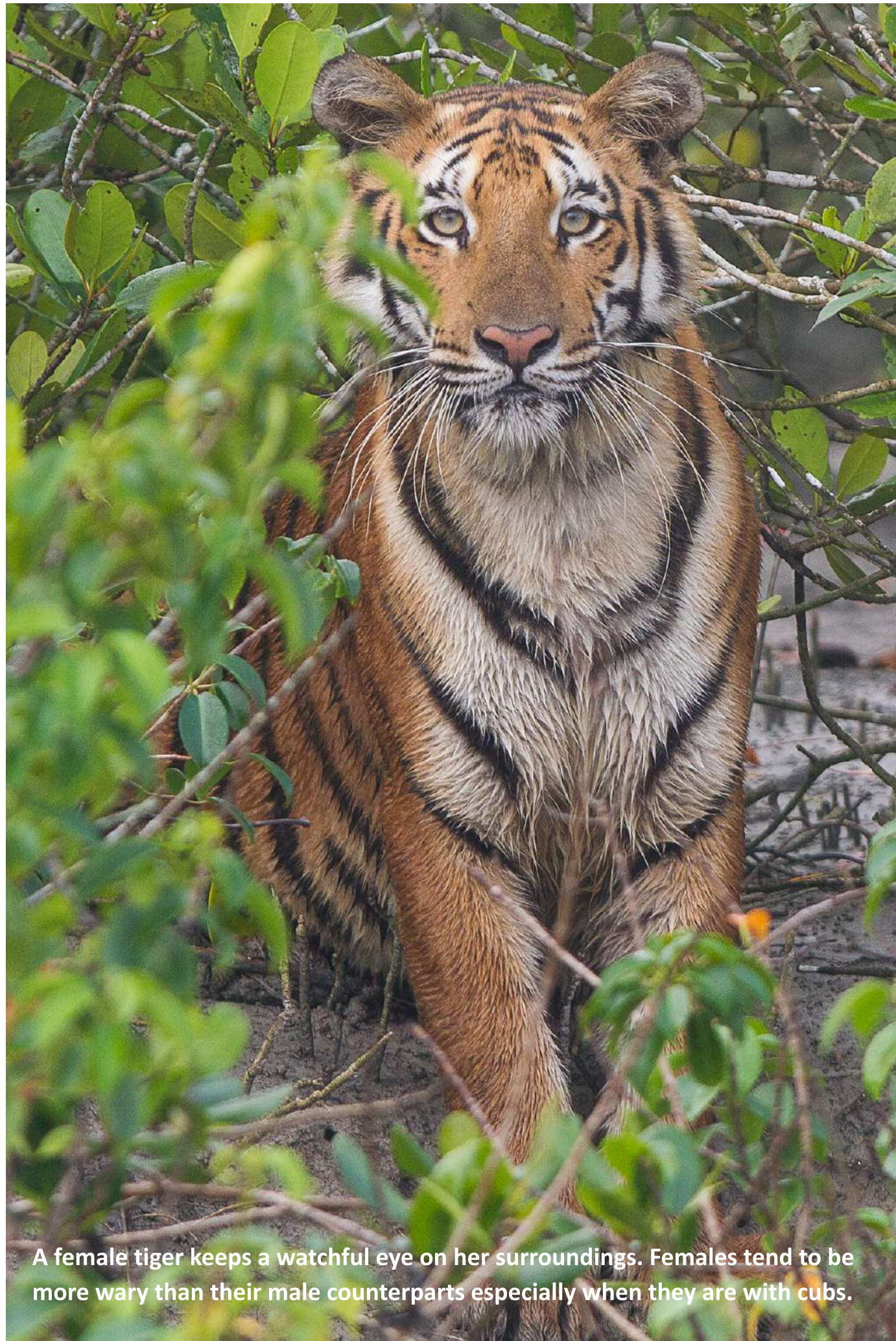
About the Photographer

Born in a small and beautiful town of Siliguri in the north of West Bengal, **Debarshi Das** grew up in various parts of West Bengal. He started his career in the IT industry in 2010. Over the last 8 years his insatiable lust for travel has taken him across 15 states in India and 13 countries in Europe. Deeply inspired by the works of Paul Nicklen and Keith Ladzinski he decided to travel to Norway, Iceland and Greenland. He was overwhelmed by the rapid rate of climate change and the vanishing icebergs. Currently he is working as a Senior Business Consultant for one of the largest Japanese MNCs in Winchester in the United Kingdom.



the roars
that tamed
the
tides *by Soumyajit Nandy*

In the mysterious thickets of the Sundarbans mangroves lurks the Royal Bengal tiger, the guardian of this unique wilderness, a creature whose enigmatic presence and fearsome reputation have catapulted it to mythical status, possibly making it this fragile eco-system's ace in the pack in the quest for an assured future.



A female tiger keeps a watchful eye on her surroundings. Females tend to be more wary than their male counterparts especially when they are with cubs.

Along the southern and south-eastern fringes of West Bengal lies this immense archipelago of islands, the labyrinth formed by which is home to the largest coastal mangrove eco-system in the world with majority of it lying in the neighbouring country of Bangladesh. In this ever changing landscape where the land meets the sea, where rising and ebbing tides relentlessly shape the landmass, where some islands have been in existence since recorded times while others have just recently washed into being, life and death have been at loggerheads since eternity, each trying to outwit the other, an incessant struggle which all sentient beings on these remote islands are a part of. These are the Sundarbans- the beautiful forests, a mighty wilderness scattered across hundreds of

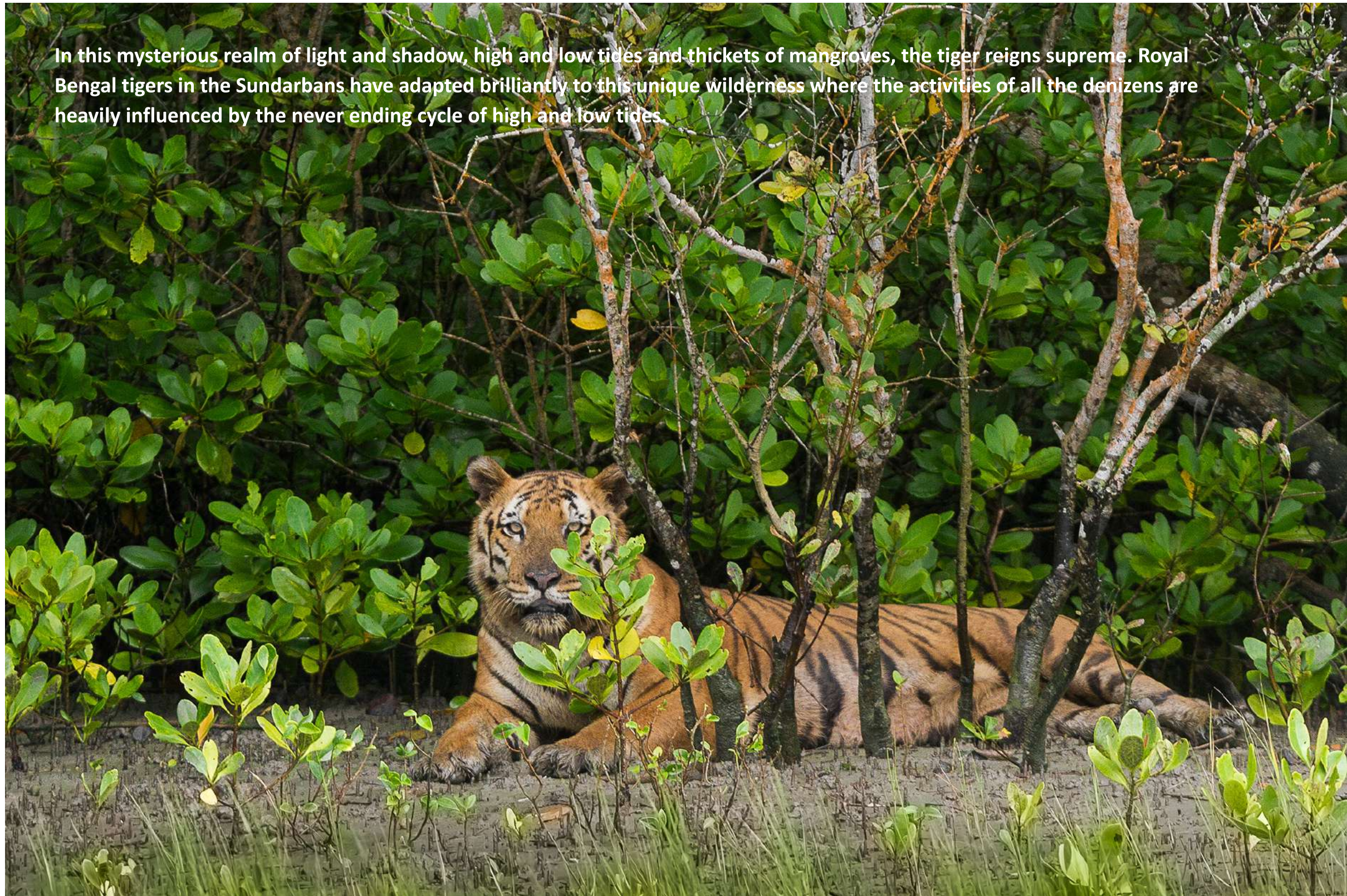
with its very own cycle of high and low tides. In a rather cunning move life accepted these terms and eventually came out as a winner defeating the huge pile of odds stacked up against it, for Sundarbans today is one of the richest eco-systems on this planet. The indomitable forces of nature which dominate this landscape eventually had to bow down to nature's very own ace up its sleeve-life itself. Every creature which leaves behind its trail on the muddy shores of these islands carefully negotiating the dagger like spikes of the pneumatophores has adapted seamlessly for a life in this water dominated world. However one creature among them stands out, by dint of a whole lot of other attributes this animal is bound to stand out anywhere else in nature albeit here the reason for

Sundarbans is home to the mighty Royal Bengal tiger, the only mangrove forests in the entire planet to be inhabited by a sizeable population of tiger.

islands located in the delta regions of Padma, Meghna and Brahmaputra river basin. In this elaborate maze of estuaries, mud flats and mangrove forests there is no border between salt water and fresh water. The rising tides on a daily basis engulf vast swathes of landmass with everything upon them disappearing under water only to re-emerge a few hours later when the water levels begin to recede. Like everything else life too on these islands has been shaped by the whimsical sea water, which lays down the terms in front of every living being on these islands

such distinction is its choice of home. Sundarbans is home to the mighty Royal Bengal tiger, the only mangrove forests in the entire planet to be inhabited by a sizeable population of tigers. For centuries the enigmatic presence of this creature has elevated this vast wilderness to mythical proportions, the fearsome reputation of Sundarbans tigers being man-eaters have cast an eerie spell on these forests. The forest too seem to cherish this disquieting reputation bestowed upon it by its favourite son, the countless mysteries it hides in its deepest darkest realms remain unattainable

In this mysterious realm of light and shadow, high and low tides and thickets of mangroves, the tiger reigns supreme. Royal Bengal tigers in the Sundarbans have adapted brilliantly to this unique wilderness where the activities of all the denizens are heavily influenced by the never ending cycle of high and low tides.



for the outside world and are diligently guarded by the guardian of the mangroves—the Royal Bengal tiger. What immediately sets the Sundarbans tigers apart from their cousins elsewhere is the choice of habitat. No other tiger species elsewhere in the world including the over 2000 odd Royal

Bengal tigers elsewhere across wild India prefers the mangroves as their habitat. Quite understandably this raises a lot of questions about the Royal Bengals of Sundarbans, the most important one being what are the necessary modifications these animals had to incorporate in their ways

of life in order to adapt to this semi-water world, not particularly suited for any big cat. The prerequisite for the tigers to surviving in this landscape which is heavily dominated by the water was to develop an affinity for water. Tigers elsewhere in India are not particularly apathetic towards water

and can be observed cooling themselves during scorching summer months in water holes within their territories, however there can be no arguing once out of it they prefer to stay dry and clean and quiet possibly wouldn't prefer spending as much time in water during the winter months as they do



Wading into crocodile infested waters is always a risky proposition and the tigers pick their spots carefully. The snarl is a possible expression of displeasure which could be attributed to a salt water crocodile lurking beneath the water.



Most animals including the tiger prefer to cross the tidal creeks and channels when the water level is midway through the tidal occurrences.

so during the summers. This can be further substantiated by observing Bengal tigers in other national parks across the country during winter months when they prefer to take their strolls or patrol their territories using the well-used jeep tracks which allow them to avoid brushing themselves against the dew laden leaves and over hanging branches of trees in their way. However this is one luxury the Sundarbans tiger cannot afford, the high tide is a round the clock occurrence, which means the tigers in Sundarbans are prepared to wet their furs on regular basis and often for prolonged periods even during cold winter months. Adding to that while taking a swim or a casual tryst with water is a leisurely proposition for tigers elsewhere the long and arduous swims across river channels at times a few kilometres wide and heavily infested with fierce salt water crocodiles is a daily something which the Sundarbans tiger along with most other animals does for a living in this part of the world out of necessity. Rising water levels or depleting prey base often force them to swim across the channels in search of higher grounds, a repeated rendezvous with hostile waters in which lurk some of the fiercest predators in the form of the salt water crocodile or even sharks. The tigers in Sundarbans generally prefer to cross these channels during low tide when it is relatively easier to negotiate these hostile waters however if the need arises these animals are very much capable of negotiating the turbulent waters during

the high tides as well. Seemingly regular activities in the life of a tiger in this wilderness such as marking its territory and the search for a potential mate mean crossing these channels and creeks which form an intricate lattice around these islands. It may be said in the same breath, the relentless cycle of high and low tides forces these animals to lead a more active life than their counterparts elsewhere. It could be possible the rising water levels which engulf almost half of the forest washes away any trace of scent marks along with constantly shifting herds of spotted deer or wild boars from one part of the island to the other even to separate islands altogether. As a result relying on a particular patch of real estate rich in prey or depending on a lasting invisible but odorous perimeter fence are some of the luxuries which have eluded these tigers.

This impenetrable wilderness has for long rendered scientific researches or theories regarding many aspects of this enigmatic creature useless purely due to the lack of visual or documented evidences. One such aspect would be the hunting techniques of these tigers. Tigers have been observed making kills from rather close quarters in national parks across India but not in the Sundarbans at regular intervals to form any decent idea regarding the techniques these tigers employ. Very little is known about this aspect of a Sundarbans tiger's life and it wouldn't be surprising at all if the mechanisms of bringing down preys



A tiger makes its way along the muddy banks along the fringes of the island, its fur still wet from a previous swimming session across one of the tidal creeks which separate these islands from one another.

is different purely due to the nature of the terrain. On the muddy forest floors of Sundarbans especially along the shores a heavy animal like tiger is bound to sink knee deep rendering a high speed chase from close quarter useless. People criss-crossing these channels on a regular basis,

people like forest officials or forest guides have observed tigers attempting to make a kill along the riverfront with little luck. To make matters further interesting the numerous pneumatophores which stick out like sharp ends of daggers from the forest floor do not lay down the ideal

platform for any form of chase without exacting serious injuries. Under such circumstances it may well be that the Sundarbans tigers are possibly more reliant on and executing a perfect ambush and blending in with the elaborate tapestry of light and shadow which is abundant in this

wilderness. The nature of the foliage and the pattern of sunlight piercing through them provide the tiger with the perfect cover for laying an effective and hugely sophisticated ambush. It comes as little surprise this huge predator has the skill set to conjure up a vanishing act at will, which makes them so very elusive, which might be a matter of frustration for wildlife enthusiasts or naturalist but spells doom for its prey. Deeper inside the islands where the forest floor is harder and not laden with the sharp piercing edges of the pneumatophores it could be that hunting becomes an easier proposition and maybe the tigers prefer to hunt more there. Yet another contentious observation which again falls short of receiving any scientific validation due to lack of enough evidences is the relative size of Sundarbans tigers in comparison with Bengal tigers across India. For a long time many naturalists and scientists have advocated the theory of Sundarbans tiger being much smaller compared to their counterparts elsewhere. Among various theories which back this claim the notable ones hold the increased salinity of water and a shortage of prey and the absence of larger preys in the form of larger ungulates such as the sambar deer or other large preys of tiger the gaur responsible for the relatively smaller size of the Sundarbans tigers. However in this context it is extremely important to observe in all this time very few individual tigers from the mangroves of Sundarbans have been successfully trapped for scientific



Sniffing the trunks of the trees for the scent of any intruder and rubbing its cheeks against the trunks to leave behind its own scent in order to maintain the odorous invisible perimeter wall, all of this is a part of the tiger's daily routine. While such scenes are common in other national parks of India, such scenes are still rare occurrences in this enigmatic wild kingdom.



These brave individuals put their lives at risk on a daily basis as they venture into the tidal creeks in search of fish and crab making them easy targets for any lurking tiger.

documentations and observations and later on released. Hence it goes without saying the sample size is extremely low to come to any such scientific conclusion. Tigers elsewhere in India too primarily feed on spotted deer and wild boars, similar to Sundarbans tigers, and while it is true larger ungulates like sambar feature prominently in the tiger's diet a massive animal like the gaur can be a tough proposition for even a tiger to bring down. In other words the staple diet for the Sundarbans tiger and tigers elsewhere in India remains more or less the same. It should also be noted several eyewitness accounts and observations by field experts and scientific observers have repeatedly

claimed in dimensions the Sundarbans tiger is no smaller than other Bengal tigers and this theory is a faulty one. The one other reason behind this theory lies in the way the Sundarbans tigers have been observed. Most of these sightings take place from afar, which could often provide a deceptive idea regarding the actual size of the animal. Also there is absolutely no way of comparing the size of the animal with reference to a human being since the tigers here don't share their domains with human beings, which often is not the case in other places where it is possible to form a clearer idea regarding the size of the tiger with reference to the tourists or other human presence.



The scene of a tiger attack leading to a death is marked by a piece of cloth known as "Jhamti" retrieved from the dead body or in case the body couldn't be found a piece of clothing owned by the deceased is used to mark the place as a warning sign for others.

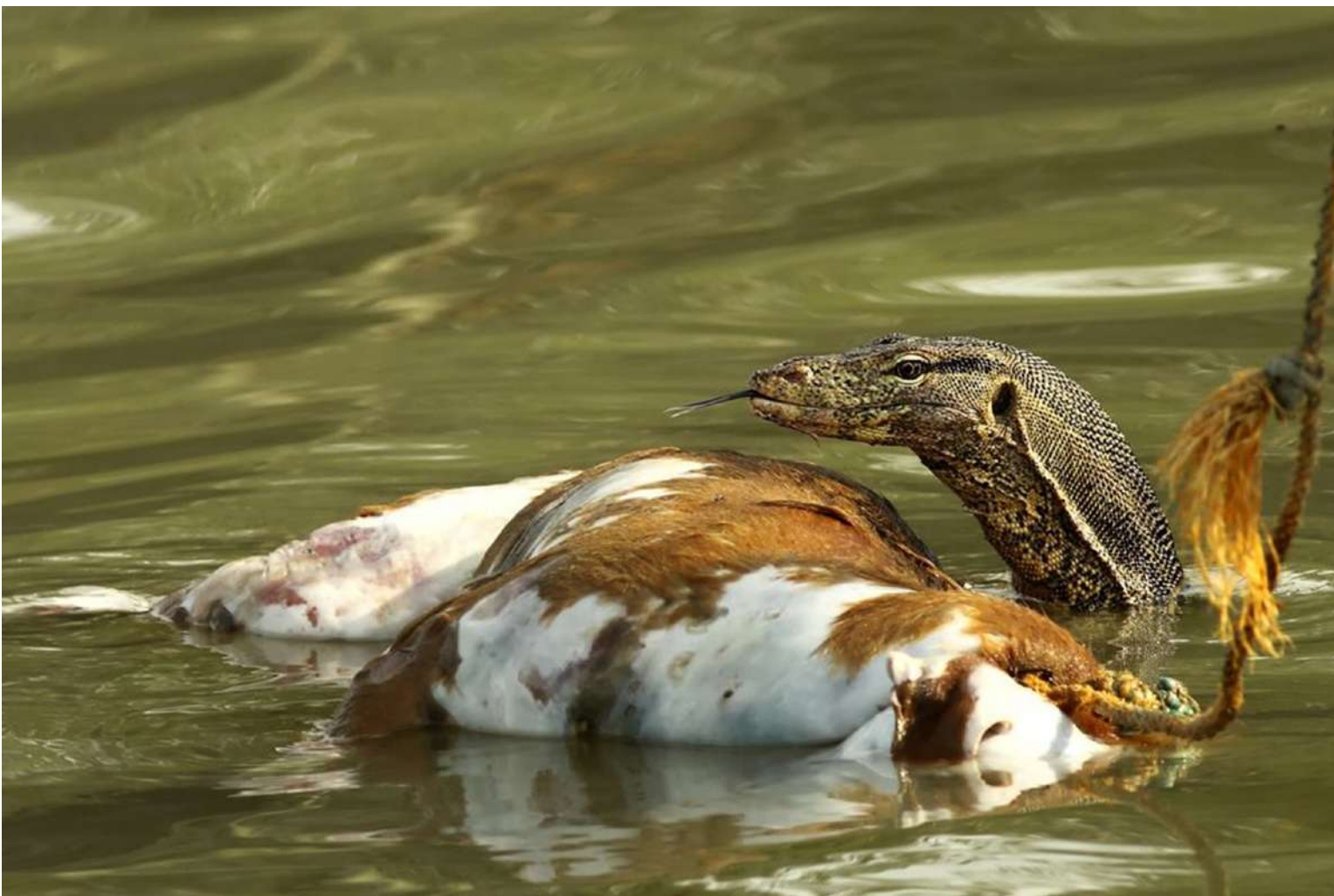
The one aspect that makes the tigers of Sundarbans unique in every respect is their relationship with human beings in this region. This relationship was forged centuries ago, when the earliest settlers started inhabiting these islands only to figure out the islands were already home to one such formidable guardian of the mangroves. It is hard to describe this rather strange association in one word. It can at the best be described as an amalgamation of fear, reverence and admiration. Quite unfairly the Sundarbans tigers have always been labelled as man-eaters in popular culture, even in the media. This is far removed from the truth. While it is true Sundarbans possibly reports the maximum

number of tiger attacks in the country, to attribute those attacks to the insatiable lust of these tigers for human flesh would be unscientific and portrays an entirely different image of these animals. Even the high number of deaths due to tiger attacks in these parts doesn't even add up to amount to even a miniscule percentage of the tigers' nutritional requirements which clearly explains human beings feature nowhere near at the top of the tiger's menu. The best way to explain these attacks would be to analyse where and how do these confrontations take place. The tide, the waters dominate this part of the world and dictates life, and human lives too are governed by the rising and ebbing tides.



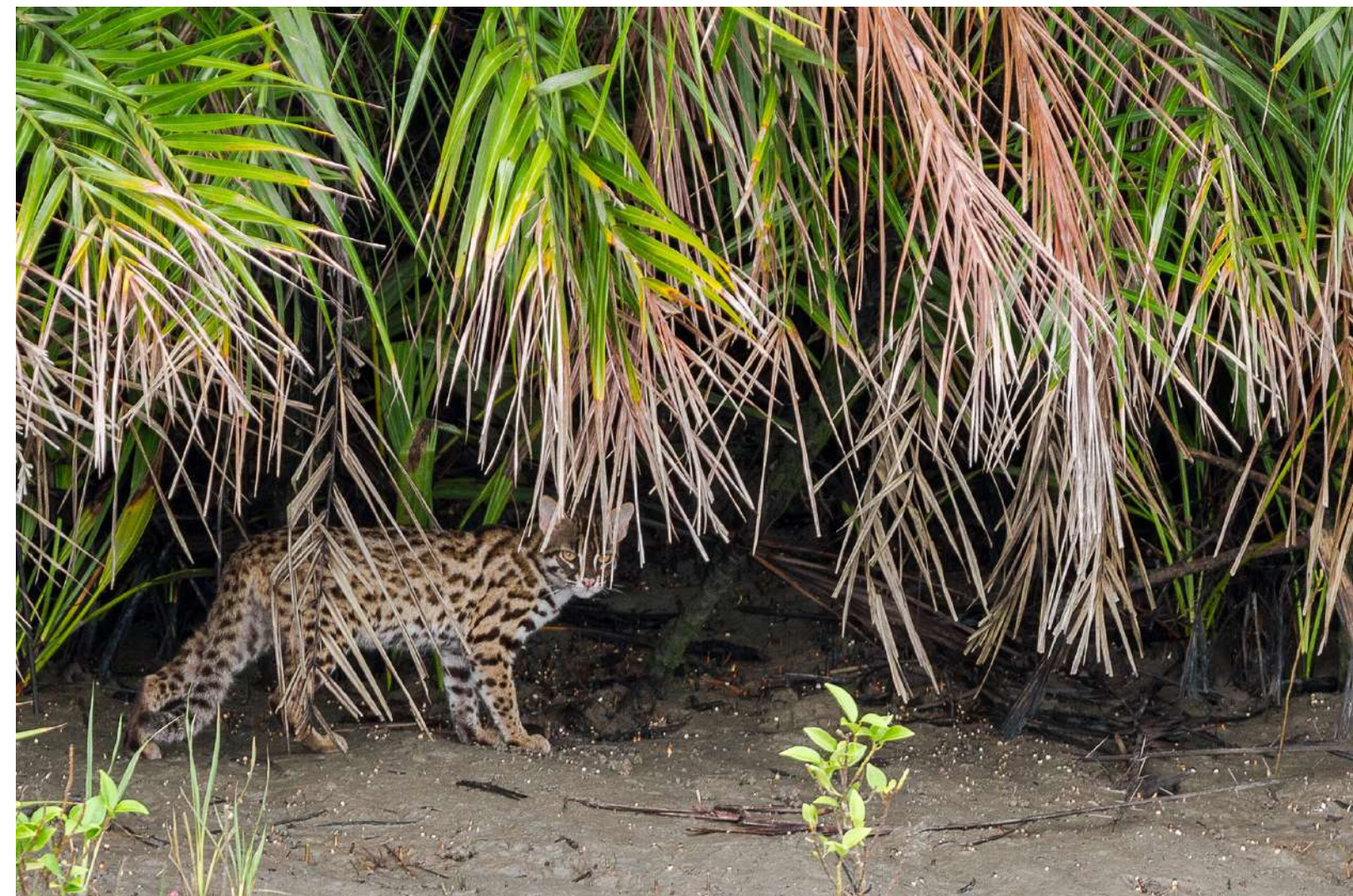
During high tide this jungle cat seeking higher grounds makes the perfect use of a makeshift shrine for Bonbibi, the Goddess worshipped by the local people as the guardian of the forests.

(below) A water monitor feeds on a washed away carcass of a dog. This once again highlights the close interaction between humans and wildlife in this part of the world.



While tigers rule the roost on land, the saltwater crocodile is the undisputed ruler of the water. This species prefers to live in brackish mangroves swamps and estuaries

(below) This wilderness is home to the elusive and rare leopard cat. These cats are mostly nocturnal when they prey on small mammals or birds.



Nylon nets are used as fences along the fringes of the forests close to any human settlement. This initiative was taken by the forest department with the purpose of preventing tigers from swimming across the channels and entering the neighboring villages. An incredibly risky job for those involved in this process of setting up the nets. These brave men rely on firing blank gunshots, yelling and bursting crackers as means of keeping a lurking tiger at bay while they go about their business of either setting up or replacing the damaged nets.



The farmlands in the villages which are in the vicinity of the Sundarbans wilderness return a meagre produce of crops due to the increased salinity of water. The remote locations of these villages separated from the mainland by network of waterways make commuting to nearby cities and towns an arduous, time consuming and often an impractical proposition. As a result of all this the villagers are heavily dependent on the forest and its natural resources for their livelihoods, thereby in a way becoming an essential part of the extended eco-system. The common

livelihoods in the villages bordering the forests are fishing, honey collection during a period of 2-3 months every year and crab hunting. It goes without saying all these daily activities bring the villagers perilously close to the forest and they are left with little choice but regularly venture inside the realms of one of the fiercest predators on this planet. Most of the tiger attacks take place in narrow creeks where the villagers often venture in the lure of a rich haul of fish or crab. They are not oblivious to the presence of the tiger or how fatal the consequences can be, it is

just that they have little or no choices. The same predicaments wait lurking around the bend for those who venture inside the forests to collect honey or a rich haul of crabs. On the part of the authorities it is a herculean task to monitor all kinds of activities along the fringes of the forests, sometimes the fishermen venture deeper into the forests than they are allowed to, which increases the chance of an encounter with the fearsome tiger manifolds. From the perspective of the tiger, such encounters are an opportunity of an easy meal, which require lesser efforts to stalk and bring

down, however contrary to popular belief the Sundarbans tiger doesn't actively seek out humans for prey, inadvertently the fate of these two sentient beings have got intertwined since centuries now. The human settlers depending on the forests know far too well the health of the forest depends on the health of its apex species the tiger, while they are scared of the tiger's presence they revere the presence of this animal as well. The innate regularity, the inevitability of these encounters set this particular human-animal conflict apart from any such scenario elsewhere on this planet. It is hard to think of any other setting on this planet where human beings come in such close contact with the apex predator of the wilderness at such regular basis. The geo-political situation of this region makes it incredibly difficult to come up with alternate modes of employment or livelihood which certainly doesn't augur well for the future. Promoting tourism and in turn providing the local people with an alternate mode of livelihood through various tourism related activities can certainly be a viable alternative though. Despite the regular occurrences of such unfortunate incidents it must be said the Sundarbans tiger is no monster lusting for human blood. It is another animal on this planet, engaged in the never ending struggle for survival which has been unfortunately clumped together with human beings in a brutal and hostile environment. Given a choice both the parties involved in this conflict would

Fights over territory is a part of any tiger's life. In the Sundarbans the thickness of the foliage often veils such episodes from the glare of the outside world only to make exceptions on the rare occasion. Two females are engaged in a confrontation over staking a claim to a piece of the mangrove real estate. As it turned out, the elder and possibly the resident female was able to hold her ground against her younger challenger whom she drove out of her territory to the water's edge. An incredibly rare scene from the elusive lives of the Sundarbans tigers.





Tigers have to constantly spray mark their territories in order to ward off any intruder. These invisible border fences along the branches and twigs of the trees are an effective way of avoiding any physical confrontation. However a face off is the only remaining option when any trespasser ignores these warnings.

Despite repeated efforts there is very little known about the various aspects of the Sundarbans tiger's life.

prefer to maintain a safe distance from one another as both have a lot to lose. In this conflict which has been raging for centuries now, there cannot be any winner, the tiger's reputation does no good it, given a choice the tiger surely would stick to its enigmatic ways and its quite way of life,

the humans if they could would have stayed away from these waters and forests and preferred an easier life which at least guarantees them a safe passage home to their near and dear ones every single day. Unfortunately neither is the case in this harsh and unforgiving landscape, that is

the reality these brave human beings who risk their lives every day for making ends meet accept every time they venture into these waters, the same harsh reality has painted a devilish portrait of one of the most resilient species on this planet, maybe this reputation is the thorny crown the

tiger has to unwittingly wear as the ruler of the mangroves.

The many aspects of this magnificent creature's life still remain shrouded in a thick veil of mystery and the mangrove with its dense foliage and uncompromising muddy terrain does its very best to maintain that enigma. Despite repeated efforts to get an insight into the lesser known aspects of the Sundarbans tiger's life very little is known about it. The eerie feeling of this majestic giant lurking in the dense foliage, the countless near miss sightings, the horrific tales of attacks on fishermen or honey gatherers all add to that legacy. Much of this mysterious wilderness is still a secret to the outside world, the world beyond the dense foliage along the shores is a land of complete mystery and that mysterious realm belongs to the Royal Bengal tiger. This supremely resilient creature which has tamed this unforgiving environment overcoming the towering odds has earned the right to rule this domain. The mysterious king of nature's very own wonderland is nothing less than a legend, the watchful sentinel of this vast ever changing landscape. Their increasing numbers as per the last census conducted in this region reveal no signs of slowing down for this animal, certainly heartening news for the forest for the Sundarbans needs the tigers, the fate of this mythical wild world rests firmly with the fate of the tigers and quite ironically that of the thousands of human beings depending on

the forests too. However one cannot help but fret over the dark clouds of concern looming large in the horizon. The census had revealed an increase in tiger numbers, there is a steady increase in human population as well and when we add to that the shrinking landscape due to rising sea water levels- a direct impact of climate change; we are left with a shrinking

landmass which must accommodate and sustain an increasing tiger and human population. This firmly lays down the groundwork for increasing human-animal conflict in the future. Conventional measures such as setting up of nylon rope fences along the peripheries wherever there is a human habitation on the other side of the river with a view of restricting the

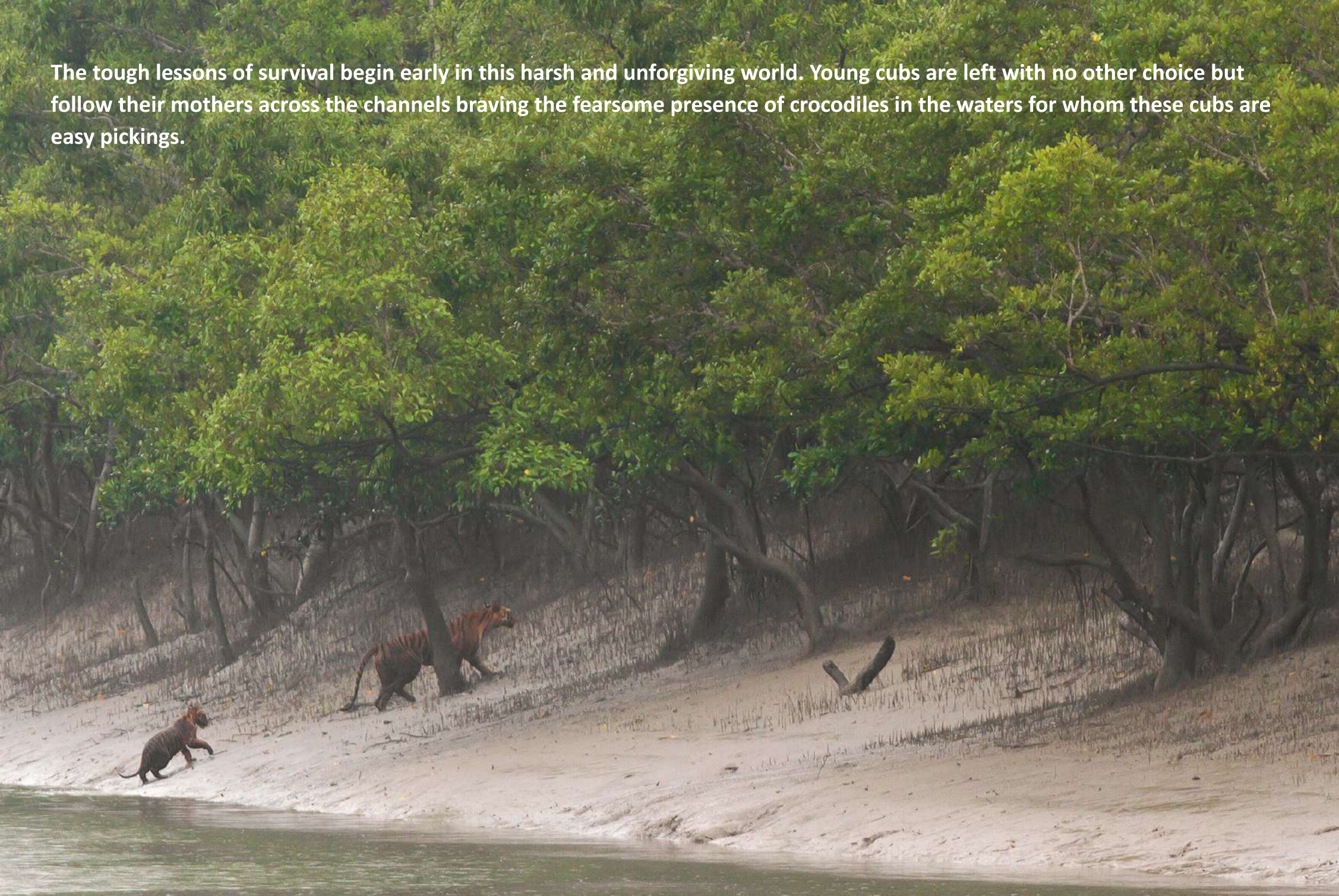
movements of the fishermen and tigers has led to some success however there can be no arguing this at the best is a temporal solution. The mangroves all over the globe are under severe threat, climate change contributing greatly towards amplifying those threats. The Sundarbans is no different in these regards yet it stands out since its stakes are much higher. We cannot

afford to lose the Sundarbans and maybe the best way to ensure a safe future for this wilderness will be to safeguard the future of the tiger and the human residents of these islands, for the mangroves need the tiger to rule them and for a large section of these downtrodden human beings the mangroves are the only lifeline they have at their disposal. The vast mangroves in



The muddy terrain where a heavy animal like the tiger can easily sink knee deep is one among the many challenges the tiger had to overcome in carving out a niche for itself in this hostile environment. In fact the tiger has done much better than merely carving a niche, it rules this ever changing landscape and over time the health and fate of this eco-system and the tiger have become intertwined.

The tough lessons of survival begin early in this harsh and unforgiving world. Young cubs are left with no other choice but follow their mothers across the channels braving the fearsome presence of crocodiles in the waters for whom these cubs are easy pickings.



Sundarbans are not only crucial for the survival of these hardworking people but for all of us. Often when we are far removed from the epicentre we tend to believe we are not a part of the occurrence, which in most cases is falsehood. The mangroves act as a natural buffer for Kolkata and many other regions in the southern part of West Bengal in the face of natural calamities such as cyclones or

tsunamis. It must be noted in this regard had it not been for the Sundarbans the tropical cyclone Aila one of the worst natural disasters in recent times would have caused much more damage to Kolkata and other parts of southern Bengal. Much of the brunt was bore by the huge stretch of natural barrier that the Sundarbans mangrove is. The stakes are high, and albeit unwittingly we all have heavily

invested in the mangroves, this particular wonderland of nature is an incredibly resilient piece ecosystem on this planet, and if not for anything else, purely from our selfish need for survival and well-being we should preserve it, for we are far more dependent on the mangroves than we can possibly fathom in the midst of our daily gruels.



About the Photographer

Breathing life into the frozen moments of nature is what **Soumyajit Nandy** has been doing through his lenses for the last two decades. His background as an architect, his early schooling in art and painting which provided the basic concepts of composition and light have contributed immensely in making this self-taught photographer a prominent name today. His photographs strike the very chord in the heart of his audience and urge them to react to the strong messages of nature conservation. His photographs have successfully altered the monstrosity of the creatures by highlighting their vulnerabilities. Soumyajit is currently whetting his tiger tracking skills especially in the Indian Sunderbans with a view of exploring this unique wilderness, understanding its various aspects and bring wildlife enthusiasts and his clients one step closer in understanding this exotic species of the Sundarbans. It goes without saying, it is not only the tiger, Soumyajit's erudition about other species in this land of Sundari trees is no doubt remarkable, something he has achieved through spending substantial amount of time in this mysterious wilderness, thus playing a key role in rebuilding the forests and providing protection to its inhabitants.



47th

Kolkata

Rath Yatra

in pictures by Suarabh Sirchiya



Devotees take turn in pulling the ropes of the chariot under the careful guidance of volunteers and security personnel.

Kolkata Rathayatra organised by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) entered in its 47 year with the 2018 version of the ceremony. Srila Prabhupada, a son of Kolkata, who founded ISKCON, started this tradition in the city of Kolkata in the year 1972. According to the episodes

depicted in the mythologies on this auspicious occasion of Rathayatra Lord Jagannath along with his elder brother Lord Balabhadra and Sister Subhadra Devi descend upon the earth from leaving the heavenly realms behind to bestow their blessings upon millions of people on this planet. Traditionally in different parts of

India three giant chariots are made for the three deities. These gigantic structures are then pulled manually by thousands of devotees and countless others join them in the procession as the deities are taken to a nearby temple where they are worshipped for the next few days till the ceremony concludes with the event of

“Ultrathyatra” which signifies the return of the deities to their heavenly abodes. Since its inception in 1972, the Kolkata Rathayatra too is following the same rituals and traditions. This year, the event took place in the month of July and the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee flagged off this event as the procession began from the Albert Road temple of ISKCON in the city on the 14th of July. The procession followed the familiar route via some of the prominent roads in the city before reaching the iconic Brigade Parade Ground where special arrangements were made for the devotees to offer their prayers and worships to their deities until the 22nd of July, the day which marked the day of the Ultrathyatra.

While this occasion is of great religious significance to a huge section of the society, it is the procession during the Rathayatra which successfully encompasses the true essence of this occasion. Like every year hundreds of thousands of people turned up for this occasion. Chants of “Hare Krishna” and “Jai Jagannath” filled up the air. Devotees jostled to touch the holy rope pulling the chariot believing that if they do so it will usher in a spell of happiness and prosperity in their lives. People from every nook and corner of the society on the pretext of this occasion mingled with each other, age, race, nationality too were no bars for taking part in these festivities. Several tableaux depicting scenes from various mythological episodes or teachings



from old fables were also a part of this procession. On this day the streets of the city witnessed these amazing sights, rich in vibrant colours and joyous faces celebrating the coming together of human beings from all corners of the world and society and uplifting the soul of humanity. The Kolkata Rathayatra has grown in stature since its inception and with every passing year the occasion has kept on adding more illustrious feathers to its cap. The festivities ended on the 22nd of July with the promise of returning the next year with much more joy to spread and bring smiles to thousands of more faces.

(pictures) The procession passed through some of the prominent streets and crossings in Kolkata such as AJC Bose Road, Sarat Bose Road, Hazra Road, Exide Crossings and many other neighbourhoods before reaching Brigade Parade Ground. Wherever it passed through the energy and excitement among onlookers and devotees were palpable everywhere. People thronged the streets in huge numbers to become a part of the procession or even to get one glimpse of their revered deity and touch the rope pulling the chariot.



A devotee taking part in this procession carries an idol of Lord Jagnath, the deity worshipped during this ceremony.



(top left & right) Devotees taking part in the occasion belong to different nationalities, age groups, caste and creed.



(bottom left & right) Colourful tableaux depicting various mythological episodes were one of the major attractions.





A devotee sways to the devotional songs dedicated to Lord Krishna playing out in the background.



Another colourful scene from the procession. These participants dressed as some mythological warriors on horseback certainly grabbed a lot of eyeballs.



(above) Devotees expressed their reverence in various ways. Some of them didn't even think twice before lying prostrate on the asphalt road to express their gratitude to their deities. Mothers on the other hand on some occasions had to urge their children to touch the ropes of the chariot and seek for divine blessings. The kids however seemed more interested in the people in colourful costumes and the tableaus around them.



On the 14th of July the city witnessed such joyous scenes and celebrations which continued till the 22nd, the occasion of Ultrathyatra which marks the return of the deities to their heavenly abodes with the promise of returning next year and fill up the lives of thousands with such moments of pure joy.



About the Photographer

Saurabh Sirohiya is a graphic designer by profession and an amateur photographer by passion. His love for photography was largely inspired by the film camera his family used to own when he was a child. Having started out with a compact Nikon digital a year into his job, he has now shifted to a Nikon D7200.

He has a particular affinity for street, travel and landscape photography. He is also fond of shooting candid photographs and portraits. He has taken part in many national and international salons, contests and competitions receiving a number of acceptances and accolades. He believes photography is never an easy job, one has to shoot in the given situation, light, shadow and composition, the photograph should look appealing without the story. The composition alone should be able to inspire the viewers as without it the purpose of photography will not be served.

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SLOTH

the misfit who thrived

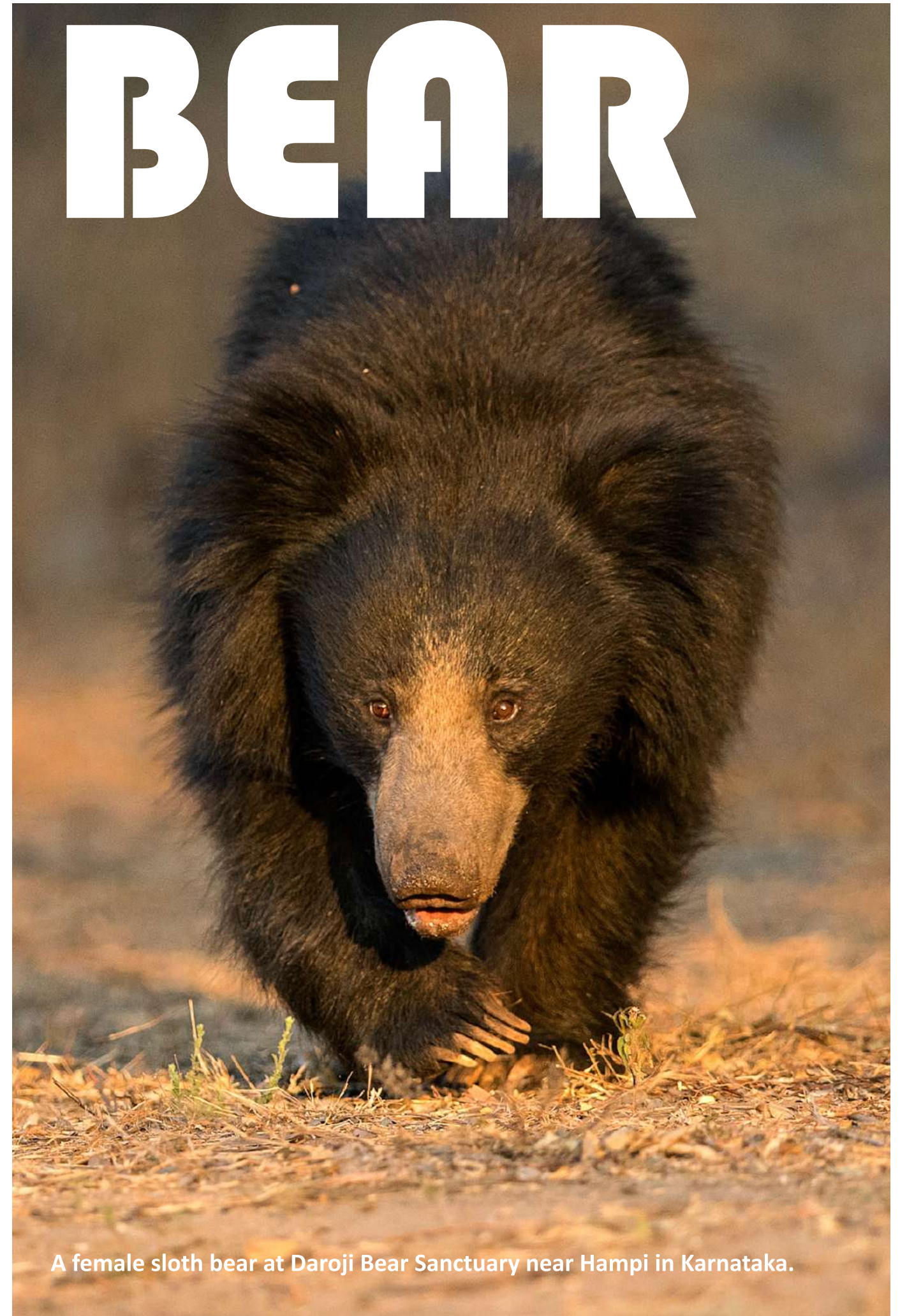
beneath the rugged, dusty, unkempt exterior lies a mighty heart, one which has allowed this amazing animal to take on any challenge and pave its own path in the signature self-willed manner.

by Praveen Siddannavar

At a cursory first glance it may very well appear to be out of place in the middle of its surroundings, a creature possibly better suited somewhere else, the slow shambling motion, the noisy walk defying the necessary acumens imperative for all wild animals to survive in a hostile environment where more often than not stealth and careful movements prove to be the difference between life and death. In these regards the sloth bear appears to defy all the prevalent notions surrounding wild animals. Often described as a stubborn creature the sloth bear certainly seems to lead life in its very own terms, and a successful one if one might add since this species of bear is a widespread one across

India and the neighbouring countries of Sri Lanka and Nepal and is equally at home in varied eco-systems. The sloth bear is one of the four bear species found all over India. Despite its rather clumsy appearance and traits devoid of the guile often exhibited by the big cats or the awareness shown by the ungulates to stay alive, this creature has done remarkably well for itself purely due to its superlative adaptation abilities. The sloth bear finds itself equally at home over a wide range of habitats ranging from both dry and wet tropical forests, rocky scrublands, open grasslands dominated by rocky terrains to the cold foothills of mountainous slopes at about 5000 feet. Such a wide range of

BEAR



A female sloth bear at Daroji Bear Sanctuary near Hampi in Karnataka.



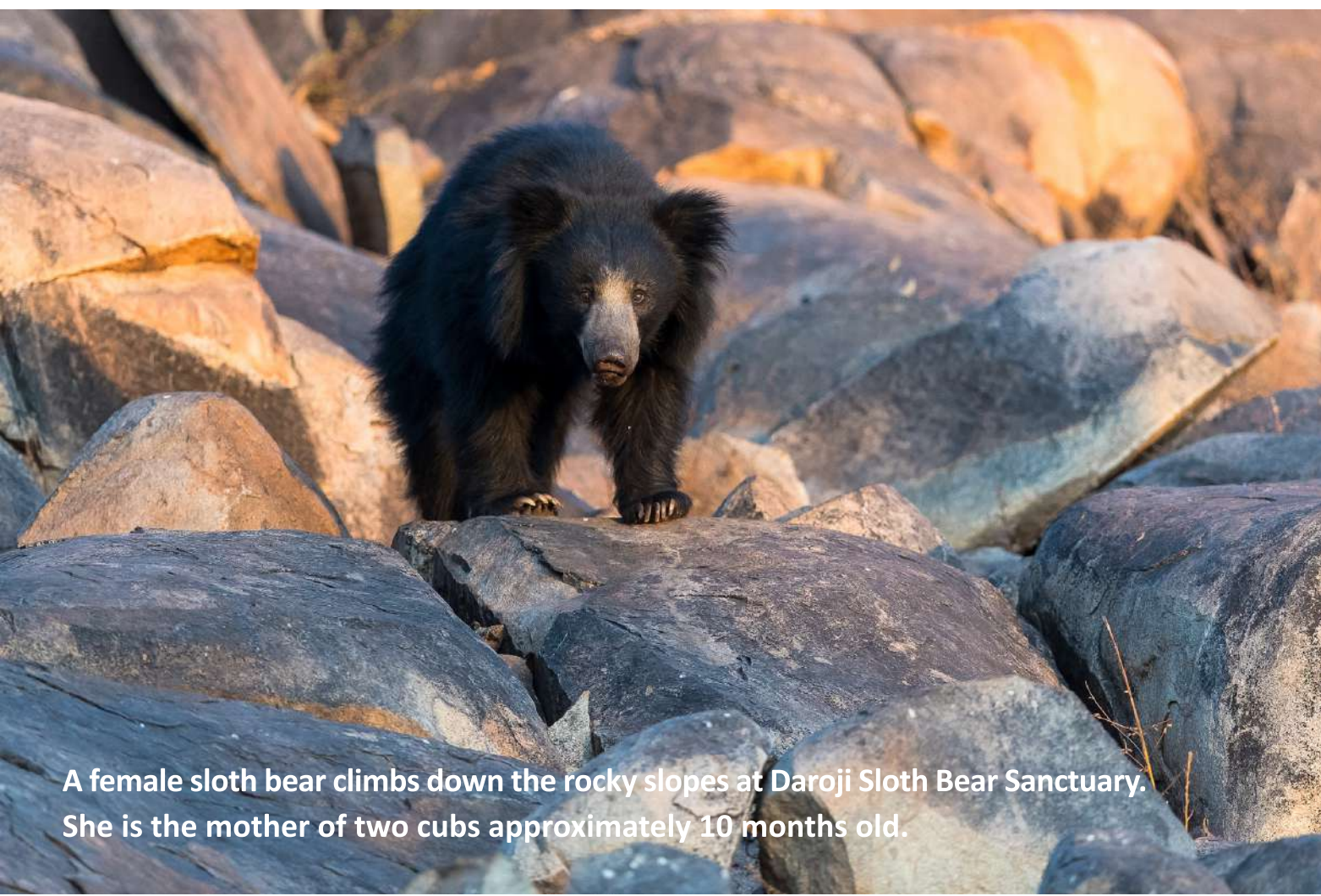
A sloth bear peeks out of its rocky abode before setting out for foraging as night approaches.

habitat coupled with a diet which includes everything from termites, various fruits and even leftovers from the kills made by other animals have ensured the present widespread distribution of the sloth bear.

The sloth bear is a rather unique animal in its own right, from the unusually curious nomenclature to its well known aggressive predisposition and headstrong attitude the sloth bear has enthralled naturalists for ages now and it all began with the rather curious naming of the animal. When scientists and naturalists came across the first specimen of sloth bear they couldn't help but notice the long sharp claws similar to the ones of the South American sloths, which fooled them into believing the large

furry mammal was related to the sloth and they came to the conclusion that the newly discovered specimen was a bear like sloth.

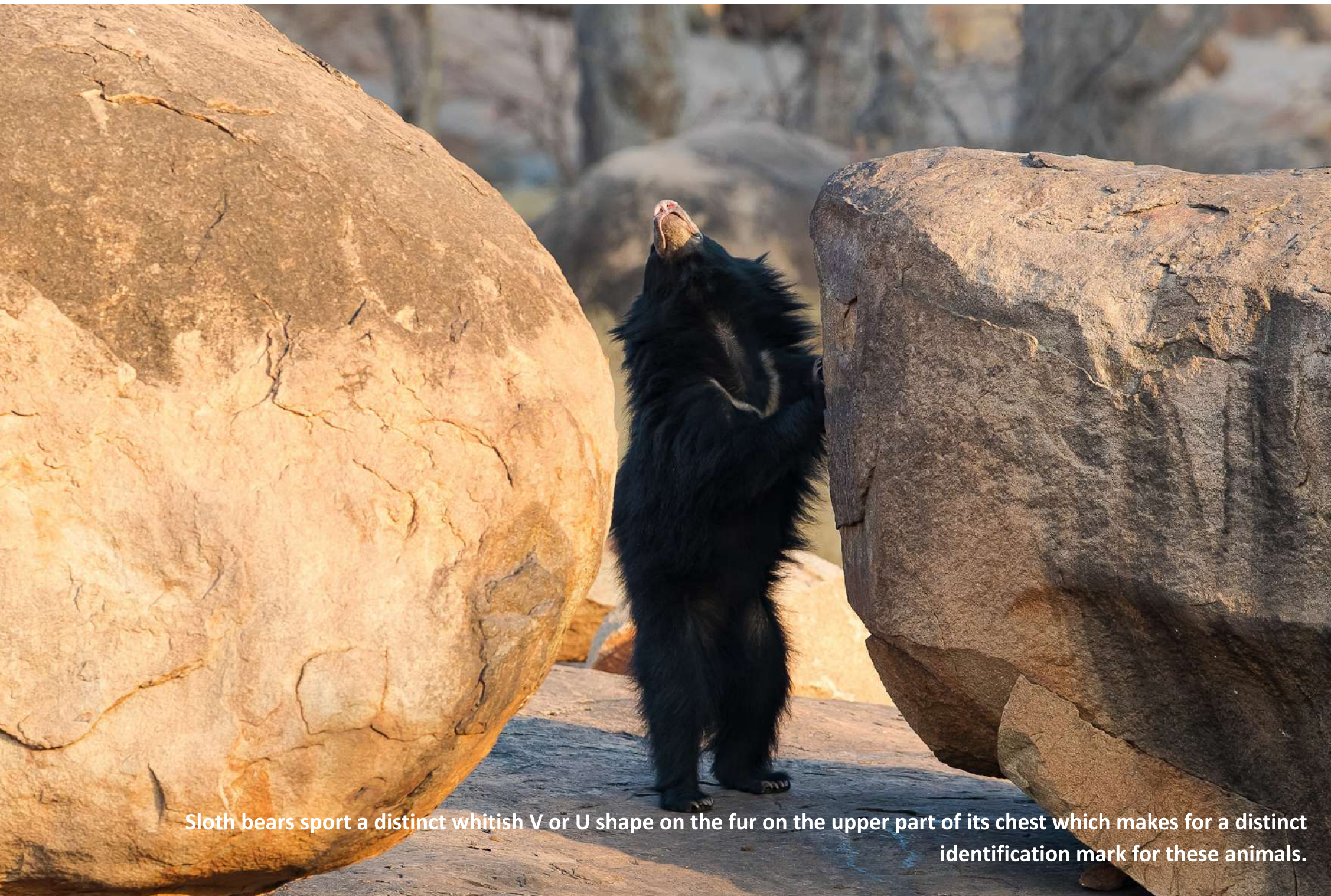
Further studies which followed and more scientific observations gradually revealed the black furry creature with sloth like claws was actually a species of bear. However in spite of these discoveries which led to the unravelling of the true identity of the sloth bear the name got stuck and the most widespread species of bear across the Indian subcontinent came to be known as the sloth bear. It is believed a population between 10,000 and 25,000 sloth bears remain scattered across India, Nepal and Sri Lanka with the majority of



A female sloth bear climbs down the rocky slopes at Daroji Sloth Bear Sanctuary. She is the mother of two cubs approximately 10 months old.



A sub-adult sloth bear ventures out as dusk approaches at Daroji Sloth Bear Sanctuary. These boulders provide them with the ideal cover during the day.



Sloth bears sport a distinct whitish V or U shape on the fur on the upper part of its chest which makes for a distinct identification mark for these animals.

them living in various national parks across India. A medium sized bear the sloth bear measures about 4 to 6 feet in length with thick black fur all over its body. The fur is thickest on the back of the neck, almost resembling a mane while it wears off on its belly and underparts, possibly a mechanism to escape the searing heat of

the tropics and dry grasslands during extreme summers. The fur sports a distinct whitish V or U shape on the upper chest which is an easy identification mark for these animals.

The name however does no justice to the animal's busy disposition. Unlike sloths, sloth bears are busy creatures; they tend to keep themselves preoccupied with the task of finding food almost all the time. They are not strictly territorial and keep wandering in search of food. The sloth like claws allow them to dig up the ground

or termite nests and the long tongue comes in handy in scraping off termite larvae which happen to be their most preferred item on the menu. The long flexible snout and an upper jaw devoid of incisors allow them to suck up large quantities of termites, ants or beetles while their almost three inch long claws rip through the termite nests or mounds. Spring brings with it a particular delicacy these animals are extremely fond of. During spring the bears using their long sharp claws as grips climb up large tree trunks to feed upon the honeycombs hanging from branches. In doing so they risk getting attacked by hordes of aggressive bees that leave nothing in the tank in trying to defend their hives. During the rest of the year fruits, roots, tubers, flowers, eggs feature in their diet as well. On the odd occasion sloth bears risk confrontation with other predators they share their domain with over the remains of their kills although it is extremely rare of sloth bears to actively pursue and bring down other animals as preys.

The fur sports a distinct whitish V or U shape on the upper chest which is an easy identification mark for these animals. The name however does no justice to the animal's busy disposition.

Sloth bears generally lead a solitary existence and while they are believed to be nocturnal they have been observed

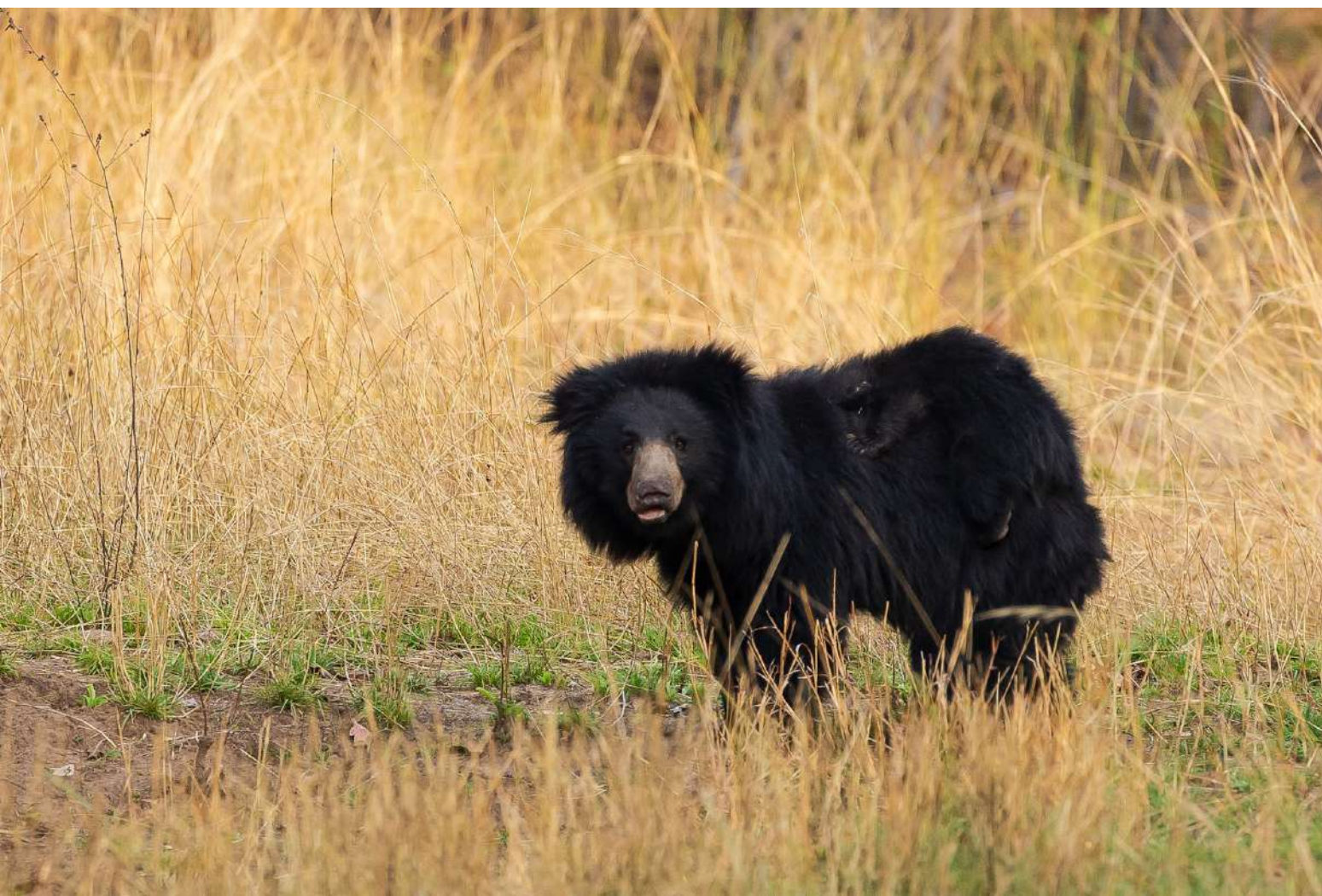


(left) Young cubs stay close to their mother and do not venture out on their own until they are about two years old. A young cub climbs up a rock in pursuit of its mother standing upon it.

(left-below) Sloth bears are the only species of bear to carry their young ones on their backs. A female carries her young cub on her back as she makes her way from one part of the forest to the other. Females keep moving their litters from one location to the other to keep the location of their cubs hidden from predators or even other bears.

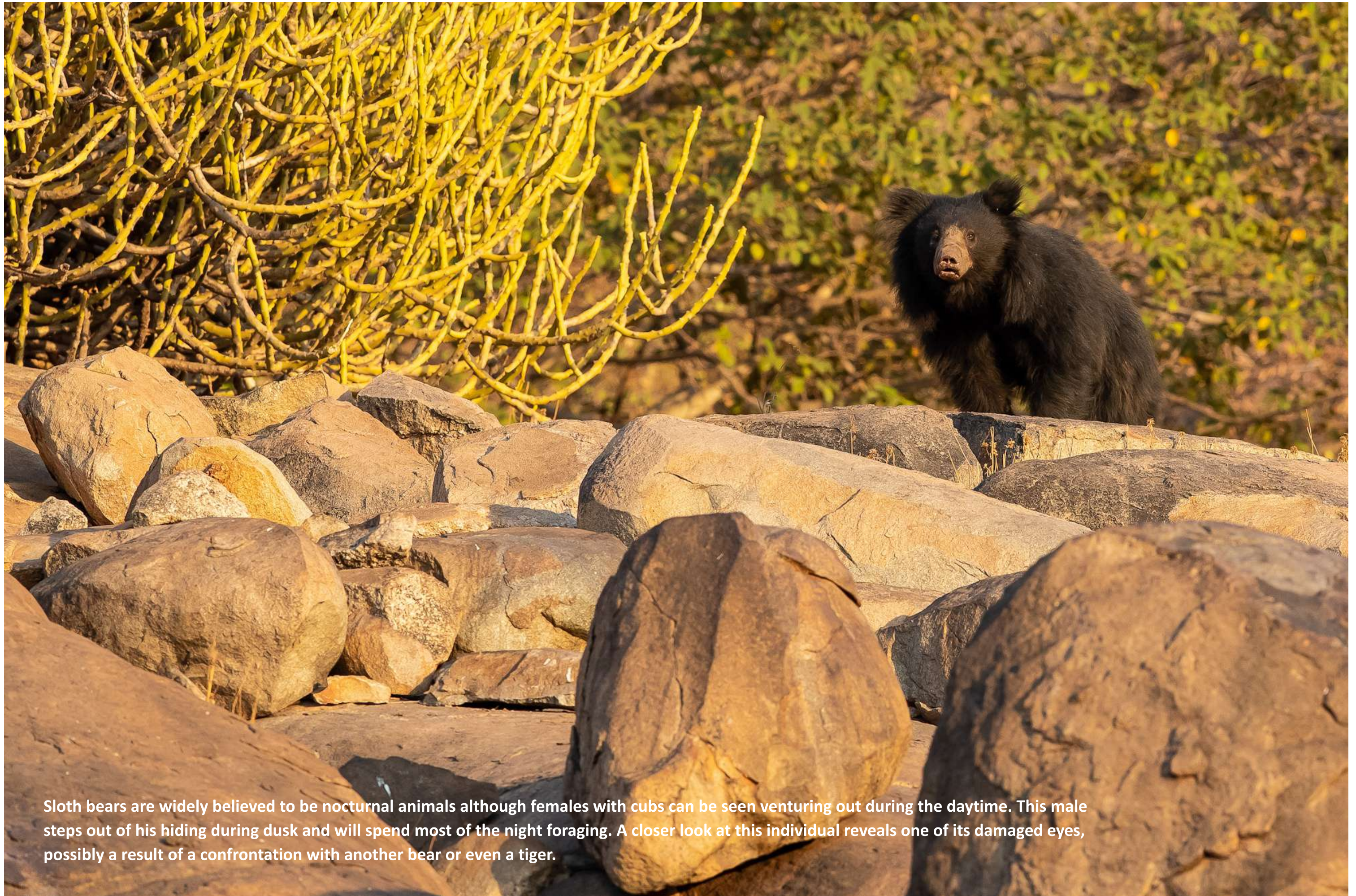
other. This is a unique practice which hasn't been observed in any other bear species. Mother bears keep relocating their cubs at regular intervals in order to keep their location undisclosed. In the absence of the mother a young sloth bear cub is pretty helpless and can be easy pickings for the other predators around in the form of leopards, packs of wild dogs even tigers.

It is a common practice among sloth bear cubs to ride on their mother's back while moving from one place to the other. This is a unique practice which hasn't been observed in any other bear species. Mother bears keep relocating their cubs at regular intervals...



extensively during the daytime. Males and females come together briefly during the particularly noisy mating period and can be seen in pairs particularly during the months of June and July. The female gives birth to a litter of two, on the rare occasion three cubs after a gestation period of about 6-7 months. New born cubs stay close to their mother and while the mother is away foraging the cubs usually hide it out within the confines of abandoned caves or burrows or hollows of fallen tree trunks. The young bears rarely venture out on their own till they are two and a half years old. It is a common practice among sloth bear cubs to ride on their mother's back while relocating from one hide out to the

When it comes to its attitude the sloth bear has developed quite a feisty and noisy reputation. Easily one of the noisier species the sloth bear makes a wide array of noises while indulging in its day to day business. Roars, squeals, huffs, rattles, gurgles all form an integral part of the sloth bear vocabulary. However it is the temperament of this animal which makes it such an unpredictable and at the same time a formidable proposition to deal with. This pugnacious animal is known to hold its ground when faced with adversities instead of opting for flight. In most parts of their widespread habitats they share their domain with another formidable creature, the Bengal tiger. The Bengal tiger is the



Sloth bears are widely believed to be nocturnal animals although females with cubs can be seen venturing out during the daytime. This male steps out of his hiding during dusk and will spend most of the night foraging. A closer look at this individual reveals one of its damaged eyes, possibly a result of a confrontation with another bear or even a tiger.



Sloth bear mothers are one of the more devoted mothers in the natural world. They care for their young ones until they are more than 2 years old, even carry them on their backs when they are young. A young cub can be seen approaching its resting mother.

undisputed ruler of its habitat commanding respect from every denizen of the wild, yet when faced with a sloth bear even the Bengal tiger prefers to avoid a skirmish. Sloth bears have been observed facing off with tigers and holding their own. Tigers are more than capable of bringing down sloth bears but they seldom engage these aggressive creatures out of the fear of suffering serious life threatening injuries which the razor sharp claws and the long muzzle are more than capable of delivering. Like many other rival factions this is one rivalry of nature which has been

going on for a long time, which has led to casualties on both sides, however there are very few animals in the world which can keep the mighty Bengal tiger on tenterhooks by its sheer will and stubborn grit like the sloth bear. The bears are quite tolerant of one another though, females have been known to be at rather ease in the presence of other females however the males are much less accepting of their counterparts and fights breaking over trespassing are not unheard of. In fact it is this aggression and the inherent tendency of not backing off often brings the sloth

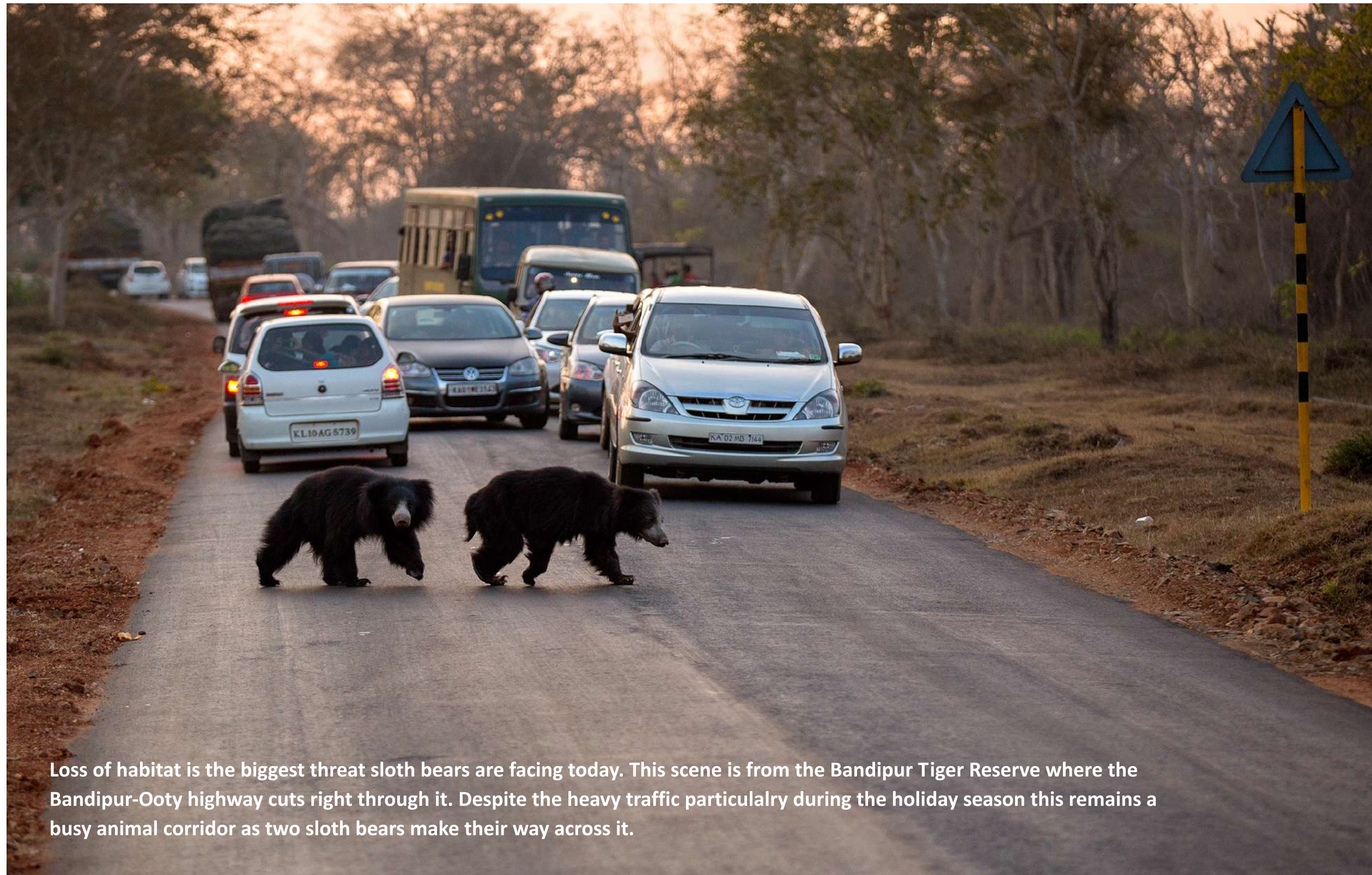


Sloth bears usually lead a solitary life. Males and females come together briefly during the mating season. The male takes no part in bringing up the young cubs. A pair of sloth bears possibly a male and a female at Bandipur Tiger Reserve in Karnataka.

Sloth bears have been observed facing off with tigers and holding their own. Tigers are more than capable of bringing down sloth bears but they seldom engage these aggressive creatures out of the fear of suffering serious life threatening injuries...

bear on collision course with human beings. The widespread domain of the sloth bear often brings it perilously close to human settlements or on the fringes of

the forests particularly in those places where the human settlement is heavily dependent on the natural resources available in the forests. This needless to say, often leads to human-animal conflict and results in sloth bear attacks on honey gatherers or on people venturing into the forests to collect firewood. Most of these attacks take place when inadvertently humans venture too close to the location of a sloth bear. Unlike most animals which would prefer flight as a generic response to threat the sloth bears fight back which often leads to fatal consequences. Most



Loss of habitat is the biggest threat sloth bears are facing today. This scene is from the Bandipur Tiger Reserve where the Bandipur-Ooty highway cuts right through it. Despite the heavy traffic particularly during the holiday season this remains a busy animal corridor as two sloth bears make their way across it.

victims suffer severe injuries on their backs or lower abdomen inflicted by the sharp claws or in some cases even bites to their necks as they roll on the ground in a last ditch attempt to protect themselves. There is no easy quick fix solution to this problem which has been plaguing both the parties

for centuries now. The only way to drastically bring down the number of sloth bear attacks on humans is by systematic and scientific implementation of well laid out plans with a broader view of addressing both the parties. Sloth bear attacks on humans are mostly unintentional. These

animals have absolutely no interest in human beings and would love to avoid our presence at all cost. In most instances, humans venturing into forests for livelihood purposes and in turn startling an unsuspecting bear going about its usual business is the most common cause of

attack. It is important to address issues of conflict with sloth bears without alienating people from their livelihood; however, reducing dependency on forests in a sustainable manner by providing alternate income-generating options will ultimately reduce such conflicts.

A pair of sloth bears out on a stroll during dusk at Bandipur Tiger Reserve in Karnataka. The pair has probably come together for mating after which they will return to their usual solitary ways. The females after a gestation period of 6-7 months give birth to a litter of two, on a very rare occasion it could be a litter of three cubs.



Apart from the ensuing conflicts with human beings every now and then the ever present threat that is plaguing the existence and threatening the future of these animals is their shrinking habitat. These animals are losing ground at an alarming rate on a daily basis. The growing presence of

human settlements along the fringes of their habitats pushes them deeper into the forests where they are forced to share their domains with other rival bears which often lead to internal conflicts. Shrinking habitat also leads to frequent face offs with the mighty Royal Bengal tiger, and even for

a creature like the sloth bear the might of a Bengal tiger can prove to be too much. The animal had already paid a huge price for the utter mindlessness and insensitivity shown by humans when they were hunted extensively particularly during the British rule in India for recreational purposes

although humans had their eyes set on this creature long before the British came to India. The practice of capturing young sloth bear cubs from the wild dates back to the pre-Mughal era. This practice was common among a certain community known as the Kalandars. The young cubs separated from their mothers at such a tender age would be heavily dependent on their handlers who would tame them and teach them various skills which would often involve rhythmic movements mimicking dancing. These handlers, members of the Kalandar community were employed by kings and royalties in their courts where they would bring their trained bears along with them for entertainment purposes of the kings and their subjects in return of hefty rewards. This illegal practice carried on for centuries and even until a few decades ago the Kaladars along with their trained bears were a common sight in small towns even on the odd occasion in big cities of India. This practice of taming the bear used to be an extremely painful ordeal for the animal itself. The Kalandars removed the animal's teeth and claws rendering it defenceless. In a further ghastly practice a heated iron rod would be hammered through the sensitive snouts of these animals and a rope would be threaded through the hollow made in their snouts. The handlers would then take these animals out in the streets and various gatherings by controlling its movements through the tug and pull of the rope through its snouts. The government imposed a ban

on these practices in 1972. However despite the ban such practices went on unhindered, particularly in the rural and small towns of the country. The Kalandars in the face of the ban would often purchase bear cubs from poachers who would abduct young bear cubs from the wild even if that meant they had to bring down the mother. As a result of which this practice played a big part in funding the illegal poaching industry as well. Most of these performing bears or dancing bears as they were popularly known as would develop serious infections in their snouts, complications in their oral cavity such as root canal problems, bleeding gums along with infected nostrils. Along with that the meagre diet of bread and milk in most cases would be insufficient to meet their nutritional demands and most of these animals in captivity would experience an incredibly reduced lifespan. Through systemic campaigning and with the collaboration with various non-profit organizations the government and the wildlife authorities gradually managed to bring the number of captive bears down and encourage the Kalandars to abstain from such practices in future by gradually providing them with alternate modules of livelihood. Finally after decades of hard work and relentless activism from various groups and animal welfare associations the in 2009 the last dancing bear was freed in India and was taken in by the animal welfare agencies. It would be somewhat safe to assume that this century old practice

is a rarity these days if not extinct; however it has come after a heavy price that thousands of these magnificent animals had to pay for. This noisy, dusty and unkempt animal in reality may be a far cry from the endearing father figure that Baloo of Rudyard Kipling's Jungle Book is, yet the truth is this magnificent animal which possesses the courage to stare back at a snarling tiger is much more in real life. This remarkable animal has a mind of its own, it cares far too little even for the reputation of a tiger, it doesn't bother to imitate the graceful movement of a deer, nor it has any affinity for the stealth of a leopard, instead unabashedly it charts its unique course, unapologetically it grunts its way through any obstacle head down, it doesn't try to be discreet in anything that it does, this is one animal which never felt the need to blend in. Underneath that messy eating habit, the unkempt dusty exterior is an animal with a big heart, a heart which not only allows it to stand up to some of the most formidable residents of the forest and punch much above its own weight but also allows it to be different, to stand out in its own right, the sloth bear in many ways is the perfect antithesis nature conjured up for itself, an animal for whom even nature graciously made a lot of exceptions for its own rules. The sight of a sloth bear in the wild, shabbily trudging along in search of the next meal should remain the boldest advert for one of the more determined forces in the wild kingdom.



About the Photographer

An engineer by profession and a natural history photographer by choice **Praveen Siddannavar** is a native of Belgavi, a city in the north of Karnataka where he is professionally involved with KPIT Technologies Ltd, Bengaluru as Center Head.

A nature lover since his childhood days, his journey in wildlife photography started with his point and shoot camera in 2009. He believes there is no meaning to wildlife photography if his photographs cannot be used to protect or conserve the endangered species. In 2012, he was shortlisted as "Finalist" for BBC Wildlife Photographer of the Year for his documentation of a rare natural history moment. One of the frames he captured during the hunting sequence of a spotted deer by wild dogs depicted the deer in a pond with the predators lurking around. The expression of both the predator and the prey made the image a special one and caught the world's attention and he won several awards thereafter.

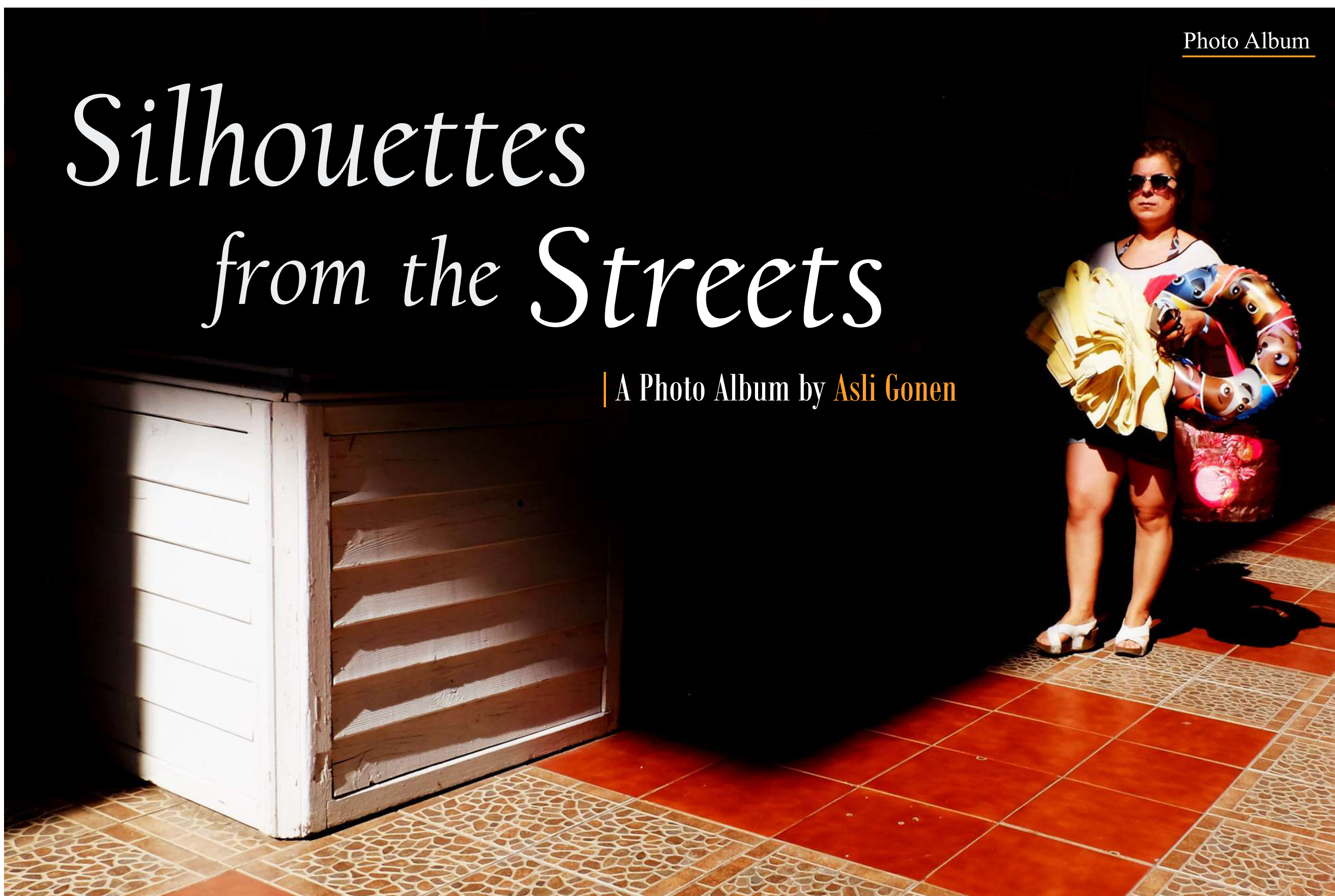
He is involved with several NGOs dedicated to the cause of conservation and is one of the founding members of Indian Wildlife Conservation Trust (IWCT) and serves in the capacity of the Vice President for IWCT. He has travelled extensively across India, Kenya and Tanzania, he is one the few to have documented elusive creatures such as the Jaguar, Ocelots in Pantanal, Brazil and the black panther or the melanistic leopard in India.

An accomplished photographer and narrator, Praveen has won several accolades in wildlife photography which include IUP Ribbon Awards at YPS International Salon 2018, Winner in 2016 in Karnataka Nature Category organised by Karnataka Tourism & Karnataka Youth Photographic Society, Winner in Predators Contest organised by Saevus Wildlife Magazine, Viewers Pick Award during NDTV's "Save our Tigers" Campaign, Special Mentions by BBC for documenting a tiger family, special mentions by Sanctuary Asia's Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2013 and few other national awards. In addition his images and photo stories have been published in leading publications such as BBC Wildlife Magazine, BBC Knowledge Magazine, Lonely Planet India, Saevus Wildlife Magazine, Sanctuary Asia, Lonely Planet, Smart Photography, Valmik Thapar's coffee table books titled Wildfire & Winged Fire, Big Cat Trails, Dubai, The Dreamland India. His photo stories were published in Daily Mail UK and Conservation India (CI).

He can be contacted at- praveen.siddannavar@gmail.com, follow his facebook page- <https://www.facebook.com/PraveenSiddannavarPhotography?ref=hl>

Silhouettes from the Streets

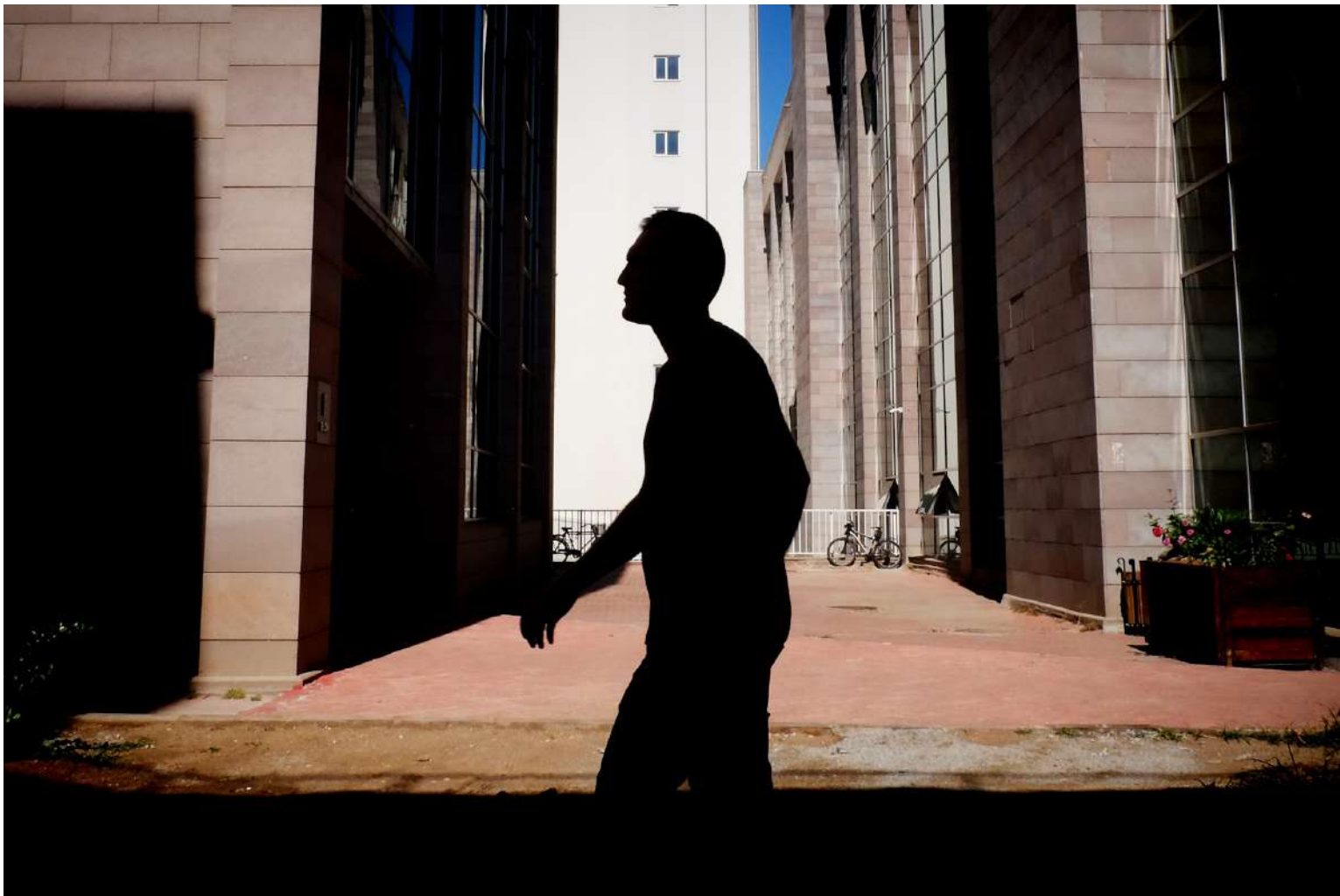
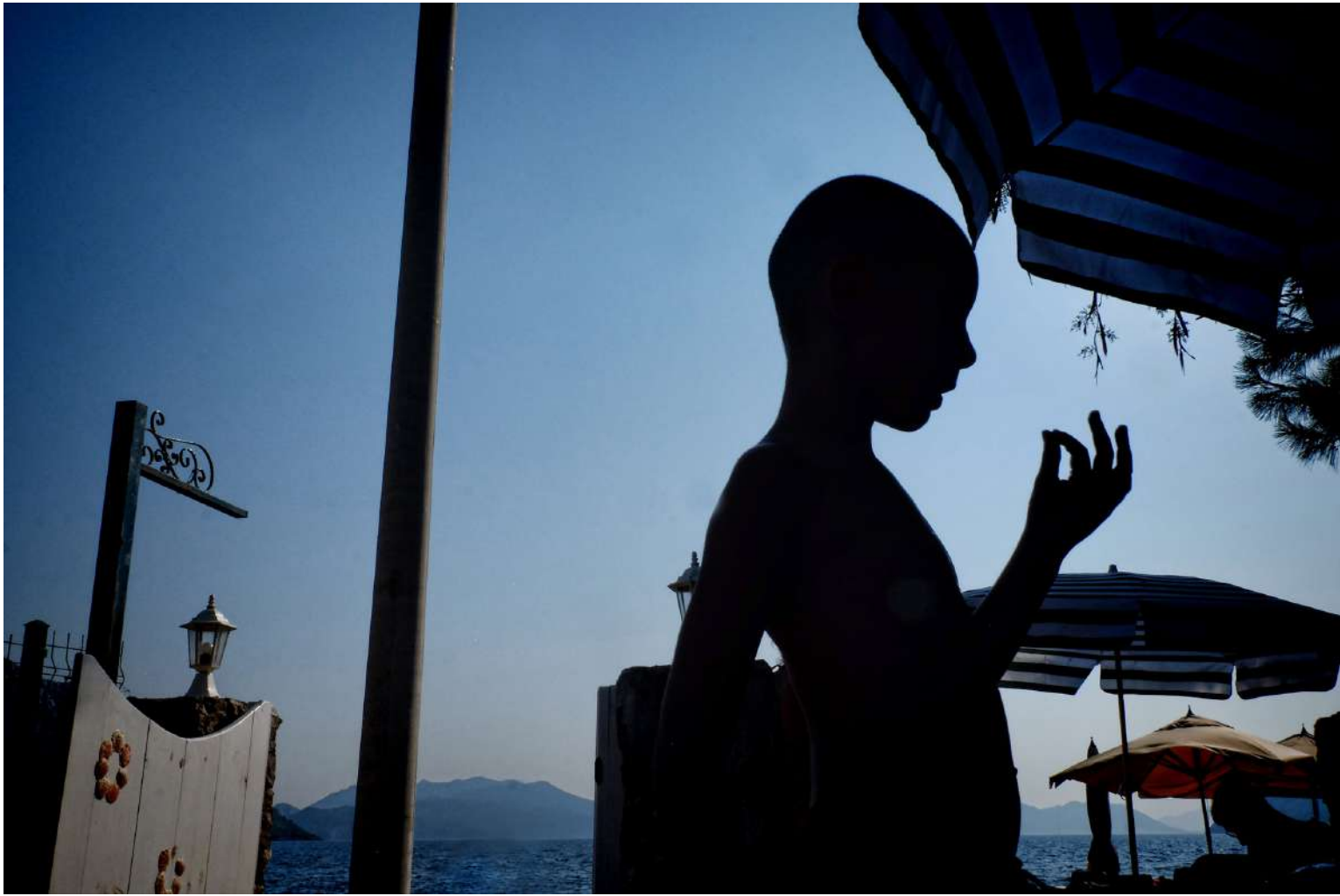
| A Photo Album by **Asli Gonen**



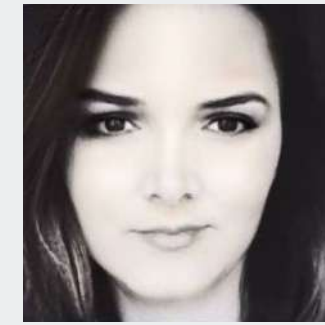






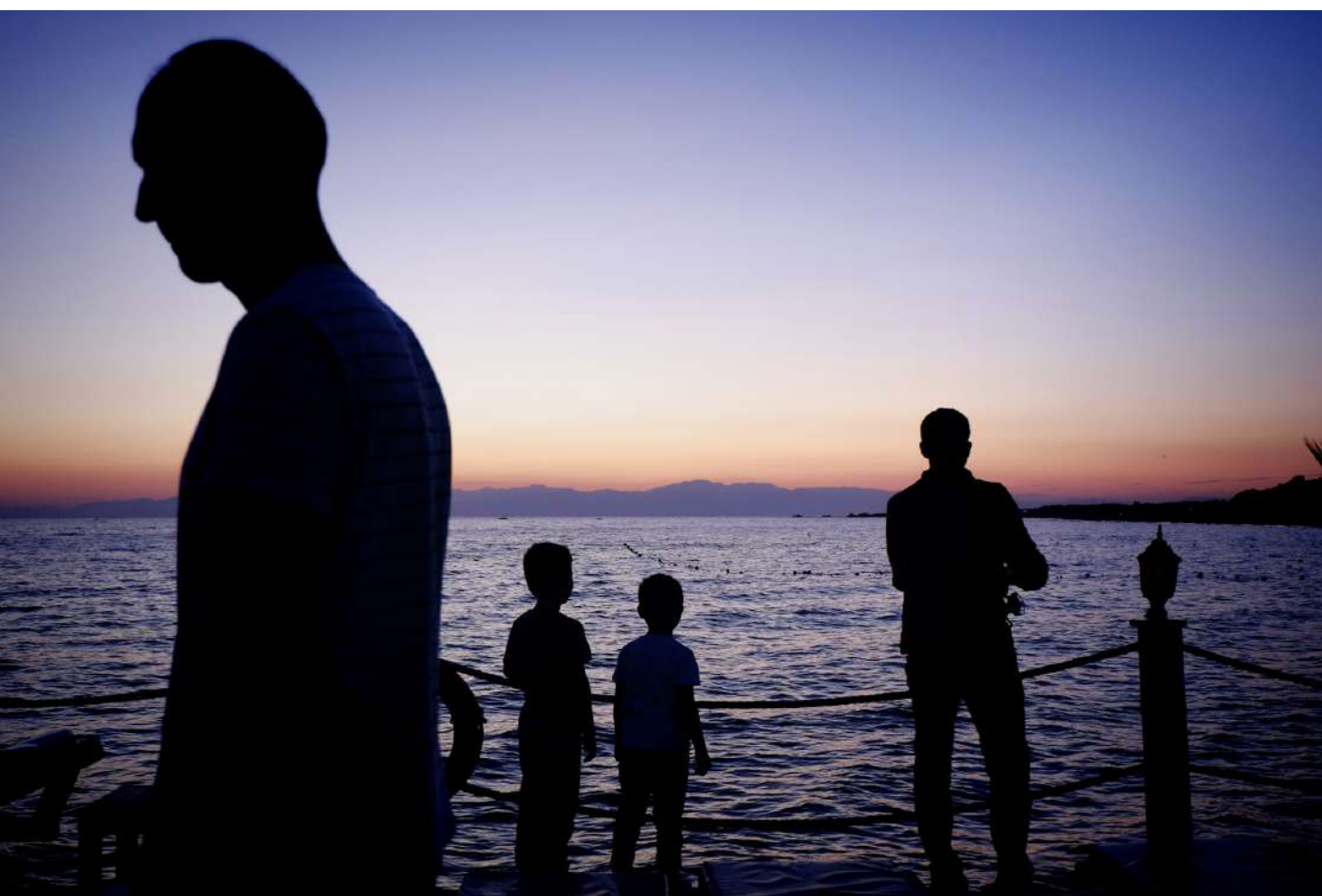






About the Photographer

Asli Gonen lives in Turkey with her husband and two children and is primarily interested in street photography and the daily lives of human beings. Her interest in photography dates back to 2007 since when she has been honing her skills following the works of her favorite photographers, practicing on the streets and observing the lives of people closely. She never opted for any formal training and focused more on low-light situations, rainy and foggy settings and shooting in black and white. However lately she is focussing on shooting in colours, especially shooting shadows and silhouettes. She believes it is a priceless feeling to be able to freeze those tiny moments from people's everyday lives amidst the clamour of the streets. Her interviews have appeared in various online magazines and websites, she has three printed book covers to her credit and a number of exhibits in various exhibitions. In 2016 she was awarded photographer of the year by Eskisehir Art Association. Instagram: <https://instagram.com/gonenasli/> 500px: <https://500px.com/pigar>



A Rhododendron Trail

Diptangshu Das chronicles his journey across the Hilley-Barsey-Gorkhey trail in East Sikkim, famous for the blooming rhododendron trees during May-June.



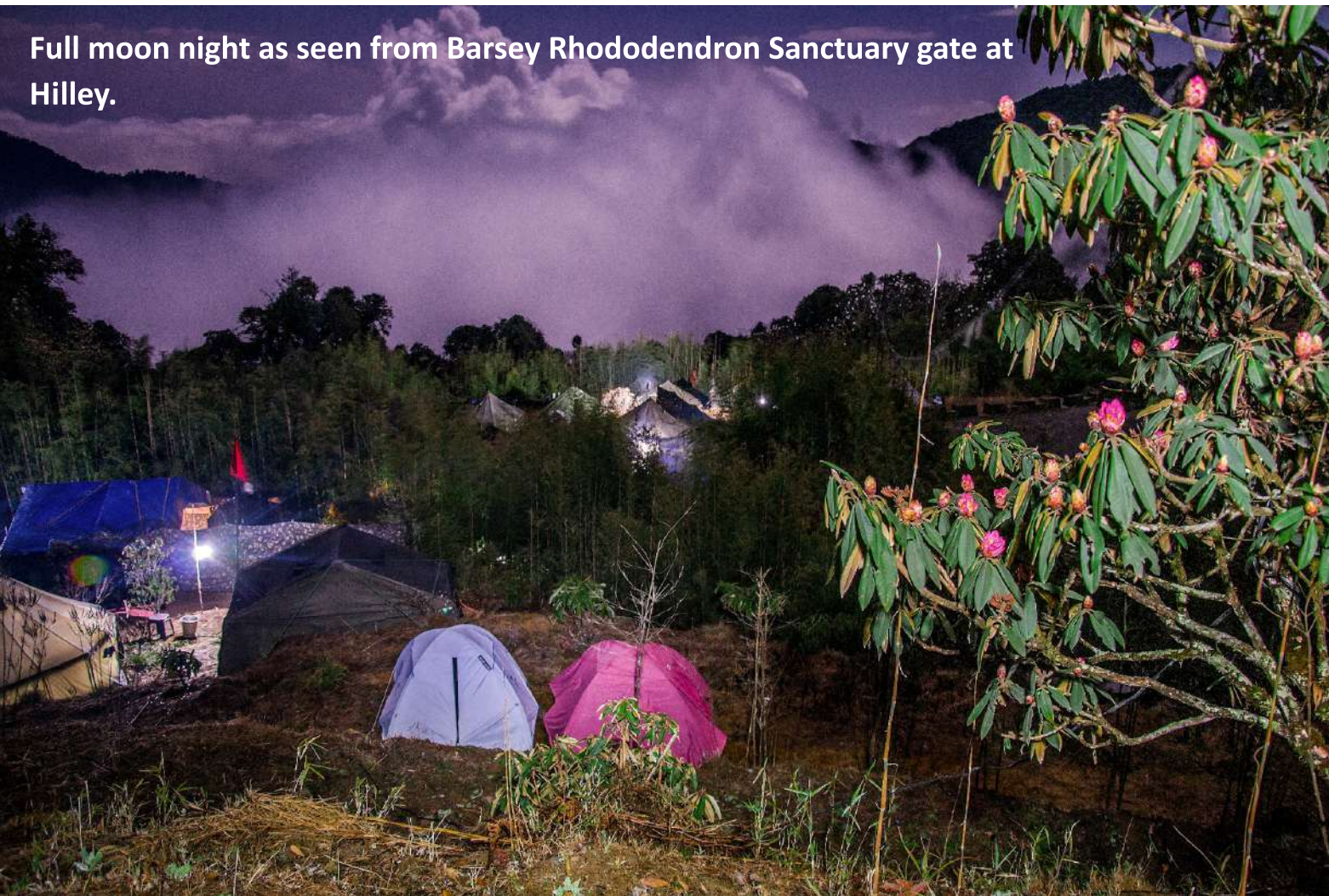
These SUVs are at the heart of all tourism related activities in North Bengal and Sikkim. These are the preferred mode of transport from New Jalpaiguri Station for tourists and locals alike.

The pristine mountains of Sikkim, a kingdom nestled in the laps of the eastern reaches of the Himalayas, even in today's time when every little piece of information is available at our fingertips, still largely remain the adobe of mystery. One look at this vast natural fence characterized by the rugged terrain, the unforgiving climate

and the cloud piercing snow clad peaks and it becomes evident nature in all its might intended this particular realm of its kingdom to stay beyond the reaches of mere mortals, shrouding it in a thick veil of enigma. Yet every once in a while nature opens its doors to those who truly lust for its beauty, to the deserving, unravelling

the treasure trove of natural wonders which lie hidden in the misty mountains, around the foggy bends of the stairways which lead to the towering summits of the highest mountains, the vast swathes of open plains which spring to life with every sunrise. For centuries the mighty Himalayas, one of the more formidable generals nature

has deployed through the course of its history, has diligently essayed the role of being the silent sentinel overlooking many such natural wonders which lie hidden in the mountainous realms of Sikkim only to reveal them to those who truly seek for it. One such beautiful specimen is the picturesque Hilley-Barsey-Gorkhey trail in East Sikkim which cuts through mountain slopes and valleys accompanied by the murmuring waters of fast flowing rivers and flanked by rhododendron trees which glow bright red during the flowering season of May-June. A seven hour ride during which the uneasy feeling of swaying from side to side along the hairpin bends of curvy mountainous roads is overcompensated by the breath taking natural beauty that graces the slopes of the mountains, takes one from New Jalpaiguri Railway Station to the sleepy little hamlet that is Hilley. This quaint mountainous village is the gateway to the Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary. As the name suggests this little piece of wild haven is home to a huge population of rhododendron trees, which when in full bloom during the months of May-June paint the entire region in a bright red hue. The trail begins from Hilley and a relatively easy hike through the wilderness which is a vibrant tapestry of bright red rhododendrons and the vibrant yellow of hemlocks leads up to Barsey. Once inside the Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary the next stop in the trail is Deoningaly Dhaap. A tiring five hour long walk through the



Full moon night as seen from Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary gate at Hilley.



Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary comes to life as the first rays of sun pierce through the foliage of rhododendron trees in full bloom.



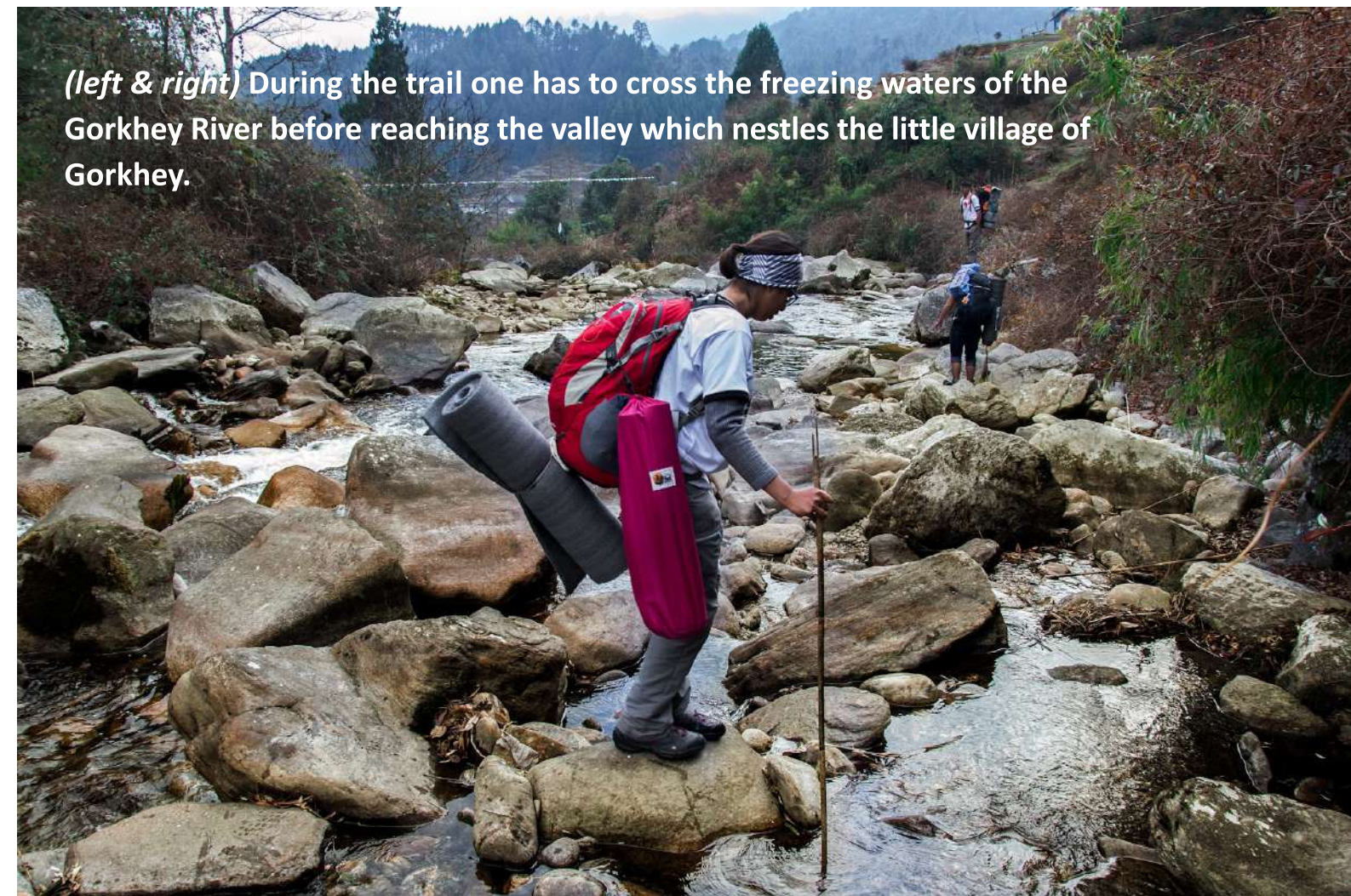
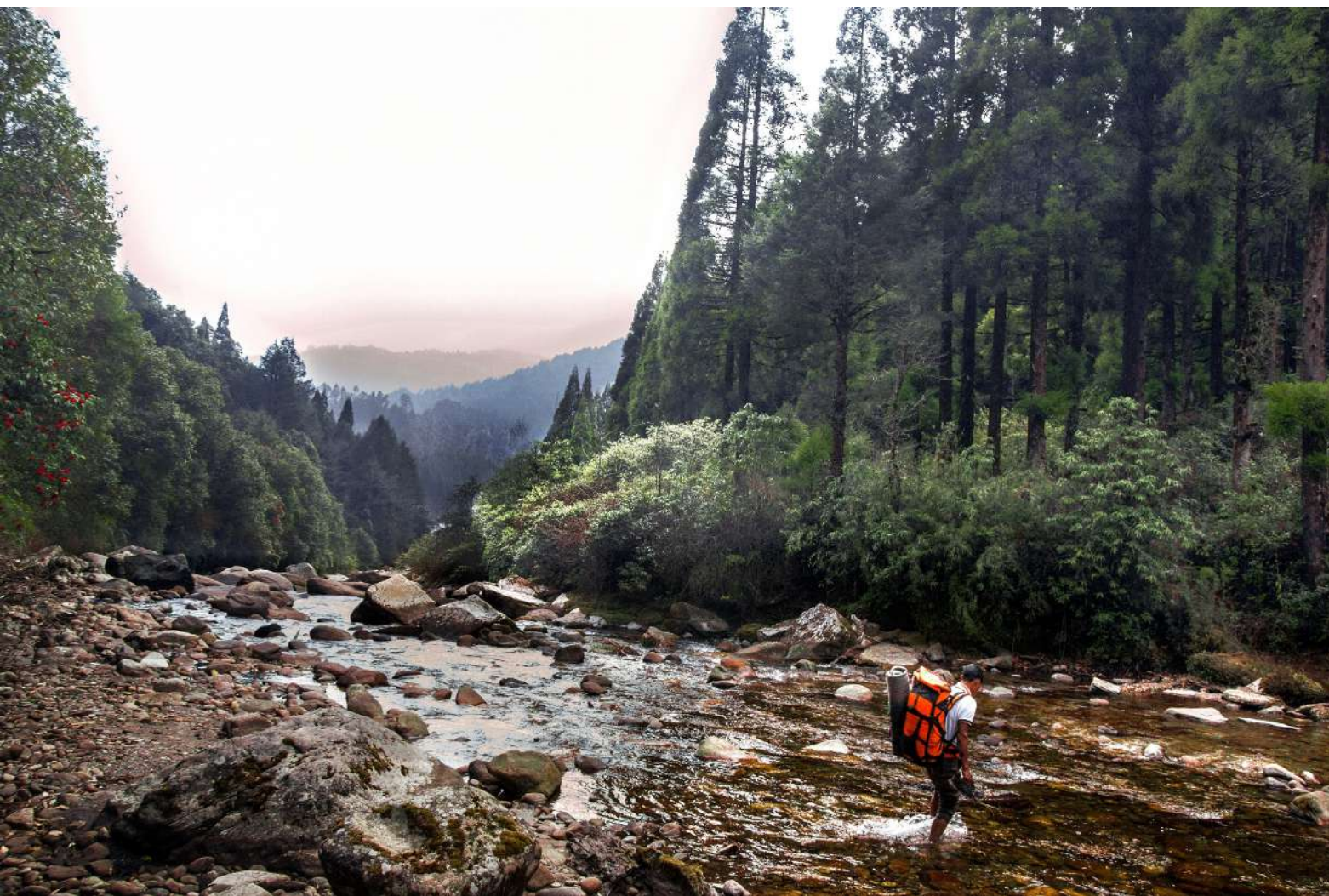
A local guide prepares dinner at the camp at Deoningali Dhaap.

sanctuary leads to Deoningaly Dhaap. This five odd hour long hike through this picturesque landscape in the midst of this colourful wilderness is nothing short of pure therapy for the tired and weary minds. While the many different species of rhododendron remain the cynosure of all eyes, there are plenty of other natural specimens which all are a part of this beautiful wilderness which can keep anyone riveted to the surroundings. The wide range of flora and fauna, the calls of hundreds of bird species, the gentle rustle of wind cutting through the thick foliage along the slopes and surely the incredibly elusive red panda which finds itself much at home in this natural setting are few of

the many reasons why this trail is a joyride. Upon reaching Deoningaly Dhaap the landscape assumes a different form. The landscape which resembles a valley surrounded by hills on all sides is a long stretch of dried up leaves and grasses. The nearest human settlement is at Barsey and this open ground is a popular site among trekkers and hikers for spending the night in the lap of this wilderness. From Deoningaly Dhaap the trail winds through the thick foliage of trees which line it and cuts through dense thickets underneath. All along the trail, the hikers are kept company by the bright red bloom of rhododendrons. During the months of May-June these bright red, or reddish pink

A panoramic view of Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary early in the morning.





(left & right) During the trail one has to cross the freezing waters of the Gorkhey River before reaching the valley which nestles the little village of Gorkhey.

flowers are everywhere, in fact the trail itself remains covered in a thick red velvety blanket of rhododendron flowers which had fallen off of the trees. Along with the rhododendron, midway through this trail the Gorkhey River decides to join the trekkers. Gorkhey River, locally known as Gorkhey Khola is the lifeline of the picturesque valley that Gorkhey is. The small settlement of human population who have made this beautiful valley their home depends on the water of Gorkhey Khola for their survival. Gorkhey valley, one of the lesser known and lesser visited places in Sikkim is a small valley along the border between West Bengal and Sikkim and it is the Gorkhey River which acts as a

demarcating line. Along the trail the Gorkhey River winds its way along, often interjecting the trail with its fast flowing waters which owing their origin high up in the mountains are almost always ice cold in nature. The river becomes such an integral part of the trail, at times the trekkers and hikers are left with no choice but negotiate these waters by wading across them. The chill is enough to numb the muscles and the first contact with the freezing icy cold water is a rather unsubtle simulation of sharp pointed end of a knife piercing through the skin. However the pain is short lived since the stretch of water is not very wide and it doesn't take a lot of time to wade through these waters over

the boulder laden river bed. The boulder laden shores of the river give way to the beautiful hamlet of Gorkhey. In the village of Gorkhey, the Gorkhey River joins forces with another water body in the form of the Rammam River. These two rivers intersect the valley of Gorkhey and divide the entire region into three quadrants. The village of Gorkhey is inhabited by a small settlement of hardworking people who are largely dependent on these mountainous lands for their livelihoods. The increasing tourism business also contributes largely towards the economy of this small demographic. The other notable thing about the village of Gorkhey is the presence of mules which seem to be the

driving force of the region. These sturdy animals are the most preferred and reliable mode of all-weather transport on this mountainous terrain ferrying everything from firewood to essential supplies from the nearest motorable road. The increasing footfall in this village courtesy the growing reputation of Hilley-Barsey-Gorkhey trek, the economy of this region has received a major and much needed boost. A few families rent out rooms in their homes for the tourists and several other families are following suit in setting up a number of homestays in the village. The topography of the region is such that it doesn't allow to be particularly well connected with other parts of the state. The nearest

An overview of the village of Gorkhey nestled in a valley surrounded by pine forests along the slopes of mountains.





The sturdy mules are the real workforce in these mountainous village. These strong animals are capable of carrying heavy loads along the steep inclines of the mountain slopes. Moreover extremely tolerant towards the bitterly cold winter these hardworking animals come to very good use during the long spells of winter when the thick layer of snow makes the task of carrying any kind of supplies even by motrable road that much more difficult. A villager takes his prized possessions, his two mules for grazing along the slopes of the mountains.

accessible road is a steep 2 hour climb which merges with a motorable road at Pathare. However upon reaching Pathare the chances of hitchhiking a ride are often slim. In the face of such situations, travellers or locals are often left with no other choice than carry on for another mile till the town of Bhareng. From Bhareng the road leads all the way back to New Jalpaiguri Railway Station.

This short weekend getaway is ideal for those who are in love with nature and its elements. The quiet villages along the trail, the incredibly warm and friendly faces in the villages and the incredible beauty of nature in full bloom all combine to take one's mind away from the mundane gruells of everyday life. The rigors of our everyday lives often consume our finer feelings; they tend to make us mechanical, almost a slave to the terms which the society lays bare in front of us. Places such as the hilly village of Hilley or the trail cutting through the Barsey Rhododendron Sanctuary and the quant village in the valley at Gorkhey alter that perception, even if it is for a few days and maybe in the bigger scheme of things these are the few days of change that is required. Nature inspires us, it makes us humble, fills us up with hope and rejuvenates our tired minds. There cannot be any better excuses than these to visit this beautiful natural setting in the eastern part of Sikkim and become a part of the natural setting along the laps of the Himalayas for a few days.



(left) Apart from the breath taking natural beauty Gorkhey and other parts along this trail have a lot more to offer. The warm and friendly human beings, the remarkable hospitality and the cherished memories of being in the company of beautiful human beings are the other reasons for going back to these hamlets in the lap of the Himalays.

(above) This man preps his mules for the daily chores which are lined up for these animals. The chores could range from carrying essential supplies to the various households in the villages to accompanying the trekkers or hikers on their trails as these mules are frequently used for carrying the necessary supplies.



About the Photographer

Diptangshu Das is a Kolkata based software engineer by profession and a vivid traveller and photography enthusiast by passion. He has been fond of various outdoor activities for almost 13 years and during a coastal trek from

Chandipur to Digha in 2011 he found the urge to document his travels. Hence his journey with his camera started. He is into travel and documentary photography. For him learning the nuances of these two genres is a never

ending process and a way of seeing his surroundings through a different outlook. He aims to explore the lesser known places across the country and document the natural beauty and the culture to create awareness among people.

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Photo Story



Tales from the Tracks

a photo story depicting the scenes that pan out daily inside the railway coaches of Kolkata's suburban railway system by Abhishek Kundu

Bengal since the time of its colonial past has always had a romantic liaison with railways. The earliest association dates back to mid-1800s when Bengal used to be the administrative hub of a number of colonial settlements across the country. The French formed their own bastion in Chandernagore, the Dutch in Chinsurah, the British in Kolkata and the Portuguese in Bangladesh's Chittagong. Suddenly Bengal experienced a rush of adrenaline flowing through its veins with all these colonial powers vying for every inch of business ground available. The stiff competition among these colonial powers and the bid to outwit the other gave birth to the first concept of setting up of a railway network all over Bengal. One Sir Rowland Macdonald Stephenson a British railway engineer for the East India Railway company in association with the renowned Bengali industrialist Dwarkanath Tagore conceived the first plans for a railway network in Bengal which culminated as the Great Western of Bengal Railway and the East Indian Railway Companies. Since then railways have become intertwined with Bengal's way of life. Apart from providing the necessary services which it was designed for, the presence of railways in Bengal captured the imagination of Bengalis in myriad ways and found mentions in popular literary works, movies and art and became a key presence in Bengal's cultural domain. From the nostalgia of an overnight train journey to

Myriad aspects of life, love, loss, joy, business pan out in every nook and corner of Kolkata's suburban railway system.(top & bottom)



a favourite holiday destination to the rhythmic rumbling of railway carriages cutting across lush green paddy fields in the countryside, Bengal's romance with the railways has stood the test of time.

The Kolkata Suburban Railway system is one such aspect of the railroad network across the state which acts as a lifeline connecting the city with its suburbs. Currently under the jurisdiction of the Eastern and the South Eastern sections of the Indian Railways, the Suburban Railway system ferries millions of people on a daily basis. During the rush hour the coaches are packed with thousands of commuters jostling for that precious inch of space, the platforms swarm with people, everyone in a hurry to reach their destination, the public address systems work overboard spelling out instructions, the uninitiated could be readily excused for mistaking the entire scenario for a warzone. With the dying of the rush hours the searing pace of things starts slowing down, the crowd begins to thin, the frantic movements give way for amblers who graciously revel in the lack of competition. The trains too bear more of a deserted look and in fact turn into hubs for a multitude of leisurely activities which could be a game of cards with other commuters, catching up with an old acquaintance or even a much deserved nap facilitated by the empty seats. While for most the railways remain a mode of transport, for many these Suburban railway coaches and the platforms are their





Most of these rakes are few decades old and haven't undergone much changes as the years rolled by apart from undergoing some much needed facelift through the odd paint jobs. These coaches with their traditional designs still ferry millions of people on a daily basis. In recent times coaches with new designs are being rolled out by the Indian Railways and are slowly replacing the old ones.

workplaces. Thousands of hawkers use the suburban railway system to peddle various products and make a living. The list of these products is endless, ranging from food items to cosmetic products, the railway coaches are nothing short of mobile supermarkets. These old coaches have remained silent witnesses to the countless anecdotes of love and joy, silently bore the pain of losses, despair they have been an integral part of festivities and calamities alike, yet unfazed by everything around them every single day they pull out of their sheds to reach out to millions waiting anxiously in hundreds of stations for their arrival.



During rush hours every inch of space inside a compartment becomes a seating accommodation and often such old habits die hard. Used to such accommodation many commuters prefer to take these seats on the floor next to these spacious doors as they go about their daily lives. This individual possibly a slave to those habits unflinchingly has taken up this airy and spacious accommodation.

This photo story highlights such scenes from the daily life of Kolkata's suburban railway system. It is not always smooth sailing, the faces inside the overcrowded coaches are reflective of that, the trains themselves cannot be certified with being punctual all the time, the stations often fall short of the state of art expectations, yet in a time when the prospect of high speed railway network in India, something akin to the famed Shinkansen of Japan seems a reality in another 5 years' time, the grand old lady of Indian Railways still rolls out tirelessly every single day connecting millions of people. In the face of the rapid modernisation of Indian Railways these coaches are ancient relics, yet they are dear to millions, for this slow, inexpensive mode of transport is the beating heart of the mass.



(top left and above) The vendor compartments are reserved for small scale traders carrying their stocks and supplies from the suburbs to the countless markets across the city of Kolkata.



(left and above) After a long and hard day the empty seats turn into resting benches for the weary souls returning to their respective homes.

The reserved compartment for the small scale traders is a treasure trove for fresh supplies, particularly food items. These items are farm produces, inexpensive and rich in quality. It is hard to find any daily commuter who hasn't made the most of this fruitful bargain during the course of daily commutes.



Often hour long journeys provide the commuters with the much needed respite to catch up with old acquaintances over a phone call or getting updated with the current affairs by glancing through the newspapers.





In the face of changing times it is possible these old and ancient coaches will become obsolete in a few years replaced by modern swanky counterparts yet these sentiments will linger. In many ways these railway tracks and train journeys resemble our lives, with their own histories of highs and lows and precious memories which in spite of changing times stay with us forever.



About the Photographer

Abhishek Kundu started his career as a retail management professional and during his career worked with renowned organisations such as Westside, Planet M Retail Ltd among others. After spending 10-12 years in this industry he decided to take up his childhood hobby photography. He has done a professional photography course from “Light & Shadow-An Institute of photography” and a professional cinematography course from “Chitrabani-A Human Touch in Communication”. Having started his career in photography in 2014-15 he has received accolades such as becoming a Gold Medalist recognised by “The Image Colleague Society (ICS)”. Currently he is working as a full time commercial photographer, performing all kinds of commercial shoots as well as fine art photography as well.

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