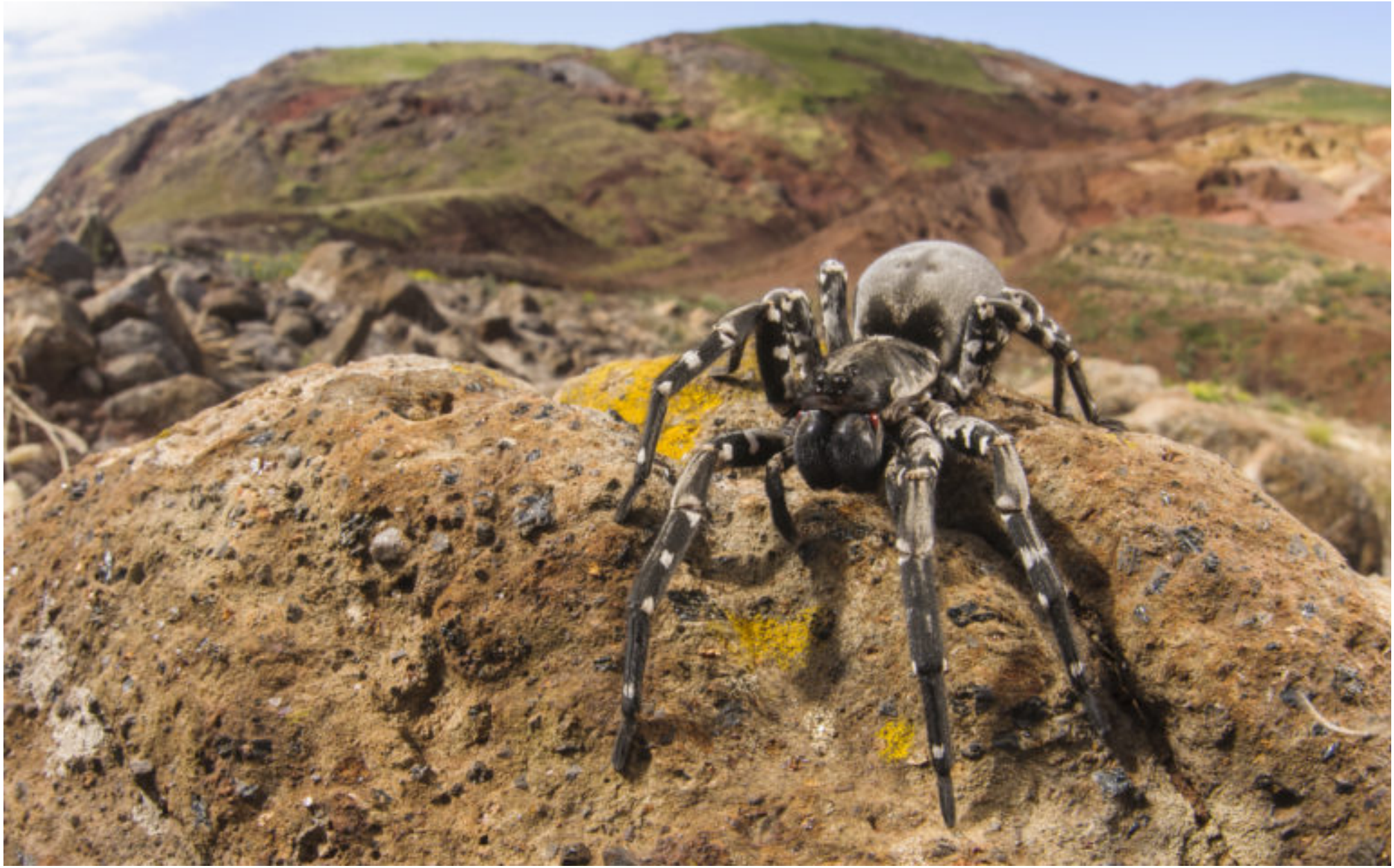
CHANGING PLANET



WILDSCREEN 2016: The Role of Photography in Natural History Storytelling

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Joanna Eede

In a cinema on the harbour in Bristol, we were shown two images: one of an urban fox standing on a stone wall in suburbia, ears pricked, head low, amber eyes staring at the camera, and the other, of an endangered Bornean orangutan climbing a tree deep in the rain forest of Gunung Palung National Park in Indonesia. These were portraits of two different species in habitats separated by thousands of miles. Yet both images triggered similar emotions: awe, wonder, humor, sympathy and curiosity. What were they up to? What happened next?

The portraits of the fox and the orangutan, taken by Sam Hobson and Tim Laman, were among many wildlife images shown at this year's Wildscreen Festival, held last month in Bristol. For the first time, the natural history festival dedicated a day to the medium of still photography, as part of its vision to ensure that *'as*

many people as possible experience the natural world, feel part of it and want to help protect it,' and in recognition of the growing importance of photography in conservation storytelling.

We were shown images of arctic floes and waterlogged woodland, crested grebes on Hampstead Heath and gray wolves in Yellowstone Park, wolf spiders in Madeira, common toads migrating to breeding ponds and freshwater crabs that live among Rome's ancient ruins.

Among the photographers who spoke was Dr. Emanuele Biggi, who talked of his love of 'lesser' known animals such as anthropods and amphibians and the joy he derives from discovery; Joseph Wright, who revealed his fascination for 'edgelands' and how his work is an instinctive response to place and Nick Cobbing, whose photographs of the months he spent floating on sea ice aboard Polar Research vessel R.V. Lance brought the cold, empty, white-blue beauty of the Arctic Ocean to autumnal south-west England.

Wildlife filmmaker and producer Martin Dohrn spoke about the 'wandering' Asiatic lions of southern Gujarat, and the difficulty of making images at night that do justice to their incredible story. He also talked about capturing one of the most spectacular of all natural phenomena: bioluminescence – the light made by living things (which was the subject of his award-winning film *David Attenborough's Light on Earth* (*Life That Glows*)). Martin's collection of ethereal images included a metallic blue earthworm from the Loire Valley, and David Attenborough holding a green Motyxia millipede. Photographer Sam Hobson talked about his mission to *'to show the commonplace in a different light.'* His photographs of urban wildlife showed vixens suckling their cubs in a suburban garden; peregrine falcons swooping high above a concrete cityscape and lime-green parakeets flocking against a backdrop of grey stone graves. The photographs revealed, again and again, the extraordinary beauty and majesty of the natural world.

But the images also bore witness to the all-too-familiar story of species' decline, habitat destruction and pollution. *'The natural world is collapsing about our ears,'* said Martin Dohrn. *'It needs us to tell its stories.'* We heard Sam Hobson's story about remote Grassholm, an island off the coast of Wales that supports 36,000 pairs of breeding Atlantic gannets (10% of the global population), but where marine plastic waste is causing devastating injuries to the birds. *'People think that plastic pollution is happening in a far off location,'* Sam said. *'In fact, it is happening two hours from Wildscreen.'*

National Geographic photographer and field biologist, Tim Laman, told his own story about the years he has spent deep in the Borneo rainforest taking photographs of endangered orangutans, and of the logging, hunting and forest fires that threaten their survival. *'We only have one chance to save the rainforest and orangutans,'* he said. *'So lets get it right.'* Kathy Moran, Senior Editor at National Geographic showed us distressing but memorable images of a black rhino's wrinkled, leathered face, with a coagulated bloody wound where its horn once grew: the tragic result of rhino poaching. *'You don't shy away from an important story,'* she said.

Only days after Wildscreen ended, the Living Planet Index revealed that global populations of fish, birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles had declined by 58% between 1970 and 2012. *'A shared understanding of the link between humanity and nature could induce a profound change that will allow all life to thrive …'* read the report.

It was obvious at Wildscreen that photography is vital tool in promoting this understanding. As Sheena Harvey, Editor of BBC Wildlife magazine said, 'W*hen we read a story, the words back up the wonder, amazement and empathy we get from the visual impact of photographs.'*

MEET THE AUTHOR

Joanna Eede was an editorial consultant to Survival International with a particular interest in the relationship between man and nature and tribal peoples. She has created and edited three environmental books, including Portrait of England (Think Publishing, 2006) and We are One: A Celebration of Tribal Peoples (Quadrille, 2009). Joanna writes for newspapers and magazines on subjects such as the repatriation of wild Przewalski horses to Mongolia, the whales of the Alboran sea, the chimpanzees of the Mahale rainforest, uncontacted tribes of the Amazon rainforest and the Hadza hunter gatherer people of Tanzania. Future ideas include a book about Tibet's nomads.

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Voices director: David Braun (dbraun@ngs.org)

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Nat Geo Explorers @NatGeoExplorers · 1h

More than 100 years ago, writer & photographer Eliza Scidmore became our first female board member. "I raise her up today because she deserves to be recognized," writes @InsideNatGeo board chair @jeancase in @Forbes. #InternationalWomensDay https://t.co/PgDmLxiKbA

5

Jean Case @jeancase · 2h

“Many of these intrepid women have chosen to go to the front lines of the unknown, often at great peril, to bring back stories, findings and images that have helped to change the world.” @NatGeo @NatGeoExplorers #InternationalWomenDay https://t.co/8DQpXZmdhU

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Nat Geo Explorers @NatGeoExplorers · 7h

It only takes one woman to inspire a generation. #InternationalWomensDay #PressForProgress #TimeIsNow

16 23

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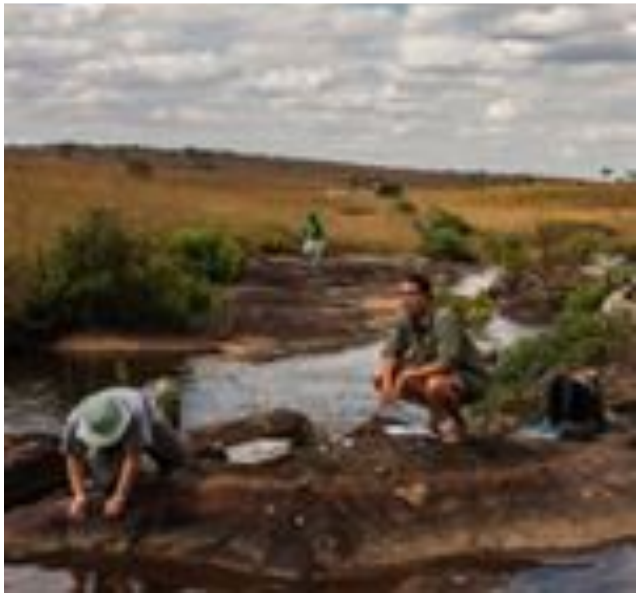

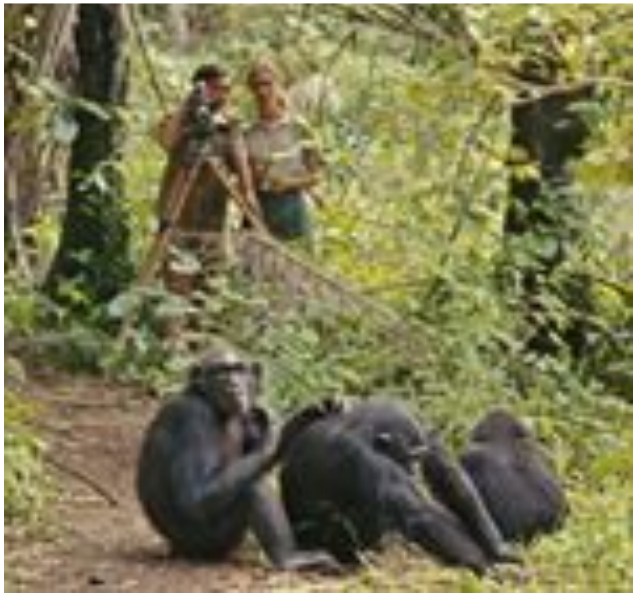

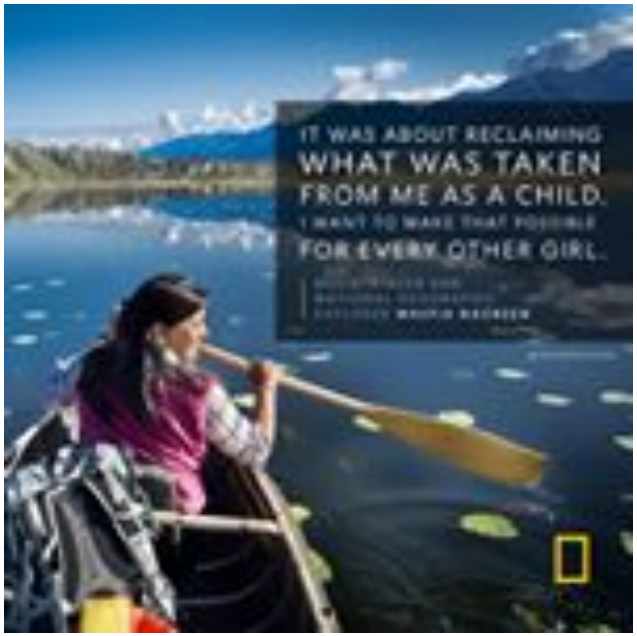
IT WAS ABOUT RECLAIMING
WHAT WAS TAKEN
FROM ME AS A CHILD.
I WANT TO MAKE THAT POSSIBLE
FOR EVERY OTHER GIRL.