



Heeding the call

Sahil Zutshi showcases rare, globally threatened birds in the forests of India's Mount Abu Wildlife Sanctuary to raise awareness on the plight of a lesser-known and neglected species

For the past year I have been photographing green avadavats, also called green munias, at Mount Abu Wildlife Sanctuary in India. As part of a conservation photography project, I aim to showcase these rare and spectacularly coloured little birds, which have a declining population. The birds are victims of the unlawful bird trade, while human activity and unmanaged tourism, coupled with negligence and corruption at the local forest department, are accelerating habitat destruction. This makes protecting the hillsides of Mount Abu imperative. Often finding myself wedged between granite boulders and crouched in tight spaces, or near uneven water courses, makes using a tripod and a heavy prime lens impractical. While working in such terrain, one quickly discovers the number of places in which the human body is capable of aching. The impenetrable thorny forests

present challenges, not to mention the thought of encountering one of the sloth bears that roam the hillsides! The reliable pairing of the D500 with the Nikon 200-500mm lens offers the flexibility to shoot handheld, often in low light. The additional focal reach of the crop sensor and the variable focal range also come in handy. Often the munias would hop over too close to take a closer look at me, forcing me to switch to the Nikon 70-300mm. A hiatus in flock activity led me to other distractions, only having to react at lightning speed when a bird reappeared. Here, I took full advantage of the D500's quick focusing and excellent Raw buffer capabilities. Wandering the forests, the faintest call of these tiny birds is music to my ears, which is also the easiest way to locate the munias, as they are often concealed within the thorny scrub. During the non-breeding season, they are found in noisy flocks while foraging for seeds on the ground. Locking focus on the tiny munias through grasses was tricky, but light filtered through the

canopy and reflected off wild flora to help produce vivid images. Since the birds are usually found perching in dense scrubland harbouring busy backgrounds, or at ground level, I was fortunate to be able to create images with clean, creamy backgrounds and pleasing bokeh.

Ongoing quest
Among the array of birds and wildlife found locally, I continue to observe and document green avadavats, despite having shot them a thousand times. Nothing gives me greater joy than photographing these beautiful birds in my quest to protect them. The endless possibilities of composing a better shot, in an effort to study them more intimately, makes every photo through the viewfinder a first. I find it to be a contemplative style of photography, where one is fully absorbed in the moment – as opposed to photographing a subject in haste to tick-off the species checklist. **N**

Sahil Zutshi is a researcher and nature conservationist. For more of Sahil's stunning images and information on his conservation work at Mount Abu Wildlife Sanctuary, visit www.sahilzutshi.com

“Nothing gives me greater joy than photographing these beautiful birds in my quest to protect them



Images: © Sahil Zutshi



Opposite page: Classed as 'dangerously low abundant and requiring urgent protection', green avadavats are endemic to India.

Top left: These rare birds have a restricted distribution and are facing anthropogenic pressures, threatening their existence.

Top right: Here, two green avadavats discuss the events of the day at a watering hole.

Middle right: Green avadavats spend a large amount of time at ground level, which makes focusing through flora tricky.

Bottom right: Known locally as 'haria', translating to the 'green one' in the regional dialect, the birds are found in relative abundance at Mount Abu Wildlife Sanctuary.

Left: Low-light conditions under the canopy with filtered sunlight beaming down on the bird produced a terrific portrait.

N Photo

This issue's special contributors...



Adrian Davies

PAGE 6

Proving that he's a fun guy, Adrian leads this issue's Apprentice into a deep dark wood to photograph fungi.



Matt Higgs

PAGE 26

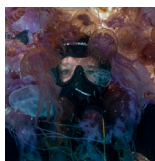
Matt turns it up to 11 in his masterclass for getting great shots of live music, from dingy pubs to festivals and more.



James Paterson

PAGE 48, 50 & 52

Do go shooting waterfalls urges James, by blending exposures with different shutter speeds to make the most of movement.



Angel Fitor

PAGE 60

Multi-award-winning underwater photographer Angel explains why things are better down where it's wetter in this issue's interview.



Sahil Zutshi

PAGE 68

No one knows green avadavats like Sahil, who documents his mission to photograph these endearing but endangered birds.



Neil Freeman

PAGE 78 & 82

Nikon School's main man shows how to use your camera's in-built compositional aids, plus how the LCH tools work in NX Studio.

But what on earth is it? All is revealed as we announce the winners of our Abstract NPOTY competition – see page 88.

Image: © Frank Kinch



Welcome to issue 131



The big news this issue is Nikon's announcement of the Z 9, its first 'flagship' mirrorless, and the specs are truly jaw-dropping, with 120fps, 1/32,000 sec shutter speed, 1000+ Raw bursts, two hours of 8K video, next-generation autofocus and a dazzling 45.7Mp stacked sensor. And we got our hands on it! See our first impressions on page 100.

With more and more of 'normal' society opening up, enabling such activities as seeing live music, we join photographer Matt Higgs on a rock 'n roll photography masterclass in this issue's lead feature.

We also join this issue's Apprentice in an ancient woodland deep in rural Sussex to photograph one of nature's strangest organisms – fungi – under the expert tutelage of top nature pro Adrian Davies.

In our Big Test, we put eight lighting options through their paces, including mains and battery-powered studio lights, as well as constant-light LED panels, to see which is best for you.

In Nikopedia, we examine your Nikon's inbuilt compositional aids, such as the electronic level and rule of thirds display, as well as explaining how to use NX Studio's powerful LCH features. Plus we have our usual mix of projects, columnists and more. Enjoy the issue!

Adam Waring, Editor

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MPHOTO

THE NIKON MAGAZINE



HANDS-ON PREVIEW

Nikon Z9: best-ever mirrorless!

- 120fps! ● 1000+ Raw bursts!
- 1/32,000 sec! ● ISO102,400!
- 2hrs+ 8K video! ● No shutter!?

FREE VIDEOS
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NikonSkills



Shoot nature close-ups

Our Apprentice learns how to capture fabulous photos of fungi with our brilliant one-on-one guide



Angel Fitor
"I fell in love with fish, and that's it!" **p60**



Light fantastic
8 home studio lighting kits rated **p104**



Let's rock!
Pro tips for shooting gigs & festivals **p26**



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