Wildlife, environment and landscape photography

Hello and welcome to today's episode that deals with photographing wildlife, environment and landscapes. The subject expert today is Aliefya Vahanvaty, who has worked as journalist for nearly a decade and is presently a freelance writer.

Introduction:

In today's programme we are going to talk about photographing wildlife, environment and landscapes. These could be from an artistic perspective or from a conservation point of view. The main two differences between wildlife or landscape photographers and conservation photographers include the purpose for taking the photograph, and the motivation behind showing the photograph to audiences. As such we will look at techniques, subject matter and the work of some of the leading photographers in the field today.

Nature Photography

Nature photography refers to a wide range of photography taken outdoors and devoted to displaying natural elements such as landscapes, wildlife, plants, and close-ups of natural scenes and textures. Nature photography tends to put a stronger emphasis on the aesthetic value of the photo than other photography genres, such as photojournalism and documentary photography. **Wildlife photography** is devoted to capturing interesting animals in action, such as eating, fighting, or in flight. **Macro photography** refers

to close-up photography in general; however, this is also a type of nature photography. Common macro subjects include bees, dragonflies, and so on.

Conservation Photography

Conservation Photography is a combination of photography that is both art and activism, it is a special niche and one to which the environmental movement already owes a great deal. It is the active use of photography and guidelines of photojournalism to advocate for conservation. It combines nature photography with the proactive, issue-oriented approach of documentary photography in order to make a case for protecting nature and the natural environment. Conservation Photography furthers environmental conservation, wildlife conservation, habitat conservation or cultural conservation by expanding public awareness of issues and stimulating remedial action.

The concept of conservation photography has been proposed out of the need to make a distinction between the creation of images for the sake of photography, and the creation of images to serve the purpose of conserving nature.

Conservation photography showcases both the beauty of our planet and its vanishing spirit, and it is the primary tool used by many conservation organizations to convey their messages. Although traditional nature photography is capable of doing the job, and did so until recently, it has become apparent that the creation of images that inspire and move people to change behaviours and take

action requires an understanding of the issues necessary to tell the story; this is the job of a conservation photographer.

Anyone with means and assets can purchase the equipment, travel to interesting regions and learn the secrets of wildlife behaviour; what cannot be purchased is the empathy and sense of urgency necessary to create awe-inspiring images that move people to take the necessary actions that ensure that the wild world survives and thrives. Photographic talent combined with environmental concern and scientific understanding is essential for conservation photography.

Through education if we can develop a conservation ethic in the vast population of nature photographers currently without it, then we will have aligned with tremendous potential for public influence. If most nature photographers went out into the world informed about conservation issues and with a purpose of sharing those issues with the people around them, photography would become an incredible link between society and nature.

The Beginnings

Despite the fact that it has only been recently recognized and defined as its own niche, conservation photography is far from new. In fact, photography has been used for conservation since the early days of its invention.

Conservation photography existed since the 1860s, although not widely acknowledged as such. One has only to see the images of Carleton Watkins,

which led to the establishment of Yosemite National Park. On June, 29, 1864, the US Congress enacted a bill signed by Abraham Lincoln, establishing Yosemite as the nation's first legislated nature preserve, to be managed through the State of California. The support of the Congress was secured, in part, through landscape photographs of Yosemite by pioneering photographer Carleton Watkins, presented to Congress by Senator John Conness.

Photographer William Henry Jackson joined the first geological surveys of Yellowstone in 1870 and 1871. Jackson was able to get some of the first photographs of what would become landmarks of the West, and those photographs were an important part of the push to turn Yellowstone into a national park On March 1, 1872, president Ulysses Grant signed the Yellowstone Act into law and the world's first national park was born.

Watkins and Jackson were conservation photographers in the truest sense. Working closely with explorers, scientists and politicians, their efforts steered public opinion and resulted in lasting protection of natural heritage. We can see that photography has empowered conservation since the beginning of the environmental movement in America. Yet it has taken more than one hundred thirty years for conservation photography to start gaining recognition as a field.

The story of Yellowstone can be considered a great inspiration to photographers today who work hard to turn their images into compelling evidence for conservation among the general public and

politicians. It can be effective for issues as diverse as mountain top removal, coal mining, clear-cutting and deforestation, or for understanding the lives of rare and endangered species, or the very real impacts of oil spills, marine debris and pollution.

For example, few people probably realized the devastation plastic debris really poses for animals until photographer Chris Jordan travelled to Midway Atoll and brought back images of albatross carcases where the cause of death is so clearly ingestion of bottled water lids and other bits. These shocking and sad images are as powerful as any other tool could hope to be in showing us what our plastic habit is doing to the planet.

Renewed emphasis on photography-for-conservation arose at the beginning of the 21st century, primarily in response to the human-caused environmental crisis, recognizing that the global pattern of ecosystem degradation was not sustainable.

The modern field of conservation photography was formalized in October 2005 with the founding of the International League of Conservation Photographers during the 8th World Wilderness Congress in Anchorage, Alaska. Prior to 2005 "conservation photography" was not widely recognized as a discipline.

A Difficult Road

Wildlife and nature photography has always been a powerful and effective tool for sharing the beauty of the natural world with the general public, people

of all ages and backgrounds. By artistically portraying the diversity, interdependence and intrigue of animals large and small, many wildlife photographers work to persuade our society to value and preserve these natural treasures for future generations.

Those who photograph nature and the environment have separated into many different factions. Some photographers view their work as the opportunity to advocate a certain position; others feel it is only important to get good photographs of wildlife. Some make their living as environmental photographers, but there is a growing number of advanced amateurs who just want to be in nature. With more advanced automatic and digital cameras, the increase of disposable income and rise of ecotravel, amateurs are sometimes producing photographs that rival the pros.

This surge of interest in environmental photography is not without its problems. Anyone who reads popular photography magazines knows when and where to go to photograph bears, whales, eagles, puffins and every other kind of photogenic creature. Some photographers, pros and amateurs alike, believe in getting the picture no matter the costs. Nature is their Disneyland; all they need to do is pay the price. It is a dangerous concept.

This crush of humanity is certainly impacting the animals' behaviour. Each summer orca whales feed on salmon in the waters between Washington

State's San Juan Islands and Victoria, British Columbia. Tourists come to see the whales with as many as 100 boats—of all shapes and sizes—trailing five or six orcas. It is now nearly impossible to get a clean shot of a whale.

But what's worse is that scientists believe the number of boats, combined with a decline in the salmon and high PCB's in the whales' blubber, have resulted in a loss of 11 individual whales in the past six years. The amount of time the whales have to bulk up on the fat-rich salmon is only a matter of weeks and, as the runs decline, any time spent away from feeding might be harmful. Canadian researchers have found that whales swim faster and change their diving patterns when boats approach. Are we reaching a point where we are loving our animals to extinction?

Far from the bumper-boats in the San Juans are the wildlife photographers who stay in tents, eat bad food, and live without the luxury of showers or toilets in order to fully document the behaviour of these incredible creatures. These are images that can advance our understanding of the world's creatures. Unfortunately, the amount of money supporting such important photographic work is declining.

In the golden days of the 1970's and 1980's, magazines like National Geographic and German Geo supported months-long assignments about the environment. But early in the 1990's, budgets were cut. The length of most assignments was reduced to weeks. Then magazines discovered it

cost them less to buy the licensing rights to a story already photographed than to pay a photographer's fees and expenses. Editors would know what they were getting and avoid the possibility of an expensive failure. The burden of financing the story was shifted to the photographer. Many of us grudgingly accepted this new paradigm because we wanted to tell these important stories. We used funds from our business or our savings to underwrite the stories. At the same time licensing fees for these images remained the same or even declined while the costs of doing business increased. Some photographers have been driven out of business.

Being Innovative

But the most serious problem facing conservation photographers is the numbing of the public to the complexities of environmental stories. Rhetoric designed for a 30-second sound bite on TV has had a polarizing effect on the public.

Conservation photojournalism will become even more important in the future as our society struggles with the escalating depletion of our once vast natural resources. The challenge for photographers will be to create evocative images that tell the story of what this loss means. And as photojournalists seek out these images, headshots of bear, walrus or salmon won't make it in this era of flash, pop and increasing visual sophistication.

Real decisive moments, not captured in animal farms but rather in the wild, will always captivate us. But there are new photographic approaches

that stimulate our thinking, too. In his groundbreaking and successful book, “Survivors: A New Vision of Endangered Wildlife,” James Balog photographed animals in a studio. Unlike photographers who hire captive animals and pose them in the wild to create natural-looking images, Balog went out of his way to photograph them in a very unnatural environment. He wanted to force the viewer to concentrate on the magnificence of these endangered creatures.

In her exhibit, “Salmon in the Trees,” Fobes printed her salmon photos and poems on flags and hung them from the trees near a salmon stream in a Seattle Park. The theme was the importance of salmon to the forests. It is another example of how photographers can get their message across in a non-traditional way.

Different photographic techniques and formats also surprise the eye. Some photographers hand-colour their black and white prints to create images with a hint of mystery. Others use wide-format cameras to capture unpredictable angles. Conservation photographers are constantly striving to creatively catch the public’s eye while remaining true to their journalistic roots. If they don’t, they are in danger of becoming the Galapagos Islands of the visual world—interesting, intriguing, but totally removed from the real world.

There are many conservation photographers out there who may not even realize they *are* conservation photographers – these include people who don't consider themselves photographers but are out there documenting what is going on in

their own neighbourhood, sometimes with powerful results.

For example, there are the people who documented the gulf oil spill with their point-n-shoot cameras so that experts could see what kind of clean-up efforts were needed for wildlife and habitats or simply to spread the word to the rest of the nation and world about what an oil spill can do to an area. Or, more specifically, there is the amateur wildlife photographer who spotted a life-threatening injury on a tiger she photographed in a wildlife park. While on a visit to India's Ranthambhore National Park in 2011, state Tourism Minister and amateur wildlife photographer, Beena Kak, chanced the opportunity to snap a few pictures of a female tiger with her young offspring. Upon reviewing her snapshots, the Minister discovered something troubling -- a festering wound on the tiger's leg, threatening the life of the animal and her cubs."In the photographs and the video I noticed a red patch on the rump of the tigress. After seeing the pictures I went back to the spot where it was squatting and found blood stains on the ground," the Tourism Minster told a national daily newspaper.
Armed with her pictures, Kak contacted the park officials requesting assistance for the injured animal. At first they didn't believe the tiger's injury warranted medical attention, but when Kak showed her photos to veterinarians, they decided that action needed to be taken.

When the tiger was tracked down and tranquilized, vets discovered a maggot-covered wound on the animal which, they say, would have been lethal if

left untreated for just a few more days. Kak, who remained in the park to oversee the animal's treatment, is being hailed as a hero for her efforts to help rescue the injured tiger.

The minister's timely action not only saved the tigress but also her two one-and-a half-month-old cubs who would not have survived without their mother.

The tiger lived, thanks to the photographer using her photographs to prove that an endangered animal needed help. This single act is no less part of conservation photography than professionals who dedicate their careers to documenting the lives of disappearing species and habitats with the hope that their images will bring about recovery.

Because conservation photography is as much about what a photographer does with an image as the quality of the image itself, photographs that accomplish conservation goals can come from practically anyone. And that makes it all the more powerful as a tool. Though, for the most part, it takes a person with an eye for artful story-telling and a whole lot of courage to craft the most compelling photographs that tell the story without words, and that can move people to action.

The Photographers

Widely known by the general public for his vivid black and white photographs of western landscapes, Adams is less known for his proactive role in conservation. He worked passionately to promote protection for the places he photographed. Adams worked closely with the

Sierra Club, a conservation organization founded in California in 1892 under the leadership of famous wilderness champion John Muir. The Sierra Club became a leading advocate for U.S. National Parks and a pioneering publisher of nature photography to support its conservation campaigns. Adams became the club's leading photographer and a key figure in its history. And as one of the few organizations to use the term "conservation photography" in the twentieth century the Sierra Club later created the Ansel Adams Conservation Photography Award in his memory.

While Adams was just learning to photograph and hike through the wilderness as a California teen in 1915, a Japanese immigrant, George Masa, was arriving in the mountains of North Carolina. His photography built lasting influence in his new home, including inspiring the creation of Smokey Mountains National Park and mapping the entire North Carolina portion of the Appalachian Trail. The park vision was realized officially under President Franklin Roosevelt in 1940 and today the mountains remembers its champion: there is a 5,685-foot peek on the southwestern side named Masa Knob.

In 1947, a photographer named Philip Hyde entered Adams' photography program at the California School of Fine Arts and soon became the most influential conservation-oriented photographer of his generation. Hyde's photography helped create Dinosaur National park and make the Grand Canyon a symbol of American wilderness, launching the Sierra Club into a national organization. Today the North American

Nature Photography Association (NANPA) offers an annual environmental photography grant honouring his legacy.

In Australia, Peter Dombrovskis is credited for helping start the national environmental movement by turning his camera toward the wild rivers of Tasmania, where proposed hydroelectric dams threatened to flood valleys, destroy wildlife habitat, and disrupt water flow. Some dams were built in spite of his efforts, but Dombrovskis helped stop the Franklin Dam project, saving a vast expanse of pristine wilderness. In 2003, he was inducted into the International Photography Hall of Fame and Museum. He was the first Australian to receive this honour.

Watkins, Jackson, Adams, Masa, Hyde and Dombrovoskis were all nature photographers who used their craft to accomplish a primary objective – protecting the lands and waters depicted in their images. They also set historical precedent because their conservation efforts achieved results, ultimately creating national parks and inspiring new laws.

Among contemporary conservation photographers, photographer, Michael “Nick” Nichols, has built a lasting legacy. He began as a photographer with the U.S. Army, studied under civil rights photographer Charles Moore, was a nominated member of Magnum Photos from 1983 until 1995, and joined the staff of *National Geographic* in 1996. Nichols works closely with conservationists and his photographs often empower their campaigns. He has collaborated with researchers to save tigers in India, Jane Goodall to protect the

world's great apes and with Wildlife Conservation Society biologist, Michael Fay to rescue endangered elephants in Zakouma, Chad. Prior to the Zakouma project, Nichols and Fay had worked together in Africa for ten years, culminating in the *Megatransect* – a project where Fay and a small team walked through the remote heart of Africa. The *Megatransect* drew international media attention, became a three-part series in *National Geographic.* With conservation at the end goal, Nichols' photographs provided the team's most powerful weapon. When Fay presented the photographs to Gabon's president, El Hadj Omar Bongo, he decided to create a system of thirteen national parks, the most significant conservation result to have been inspired by photography in recent decades.

If there is one person to thank for giving conservation photography a name and status within photography as an art and tool, it is Cristina Mittermeier. She is the founder of International League of Conservation Photographers. Born in Mexico, Mittermeier was a biochemical engineer, focusing specifically on marine sciences, but moved into photography as a way to have a more immediate impact on conservation. One of the projects she is most dedicated to is documenting the ecosystems and communities that will be impacted by the construction of the Belo Monte dam in Brazil. The dam will disrupt the lives of 40,000 people as it floods over 500 kilometres of land. Despite protests by environmentalists and indigenous people, Brazil has decided to move forward with the dam, which some say undermines Brazil's efforts to be a leader in environmentalism.

“In many of the most remote and inaccessible corners of our planet, indigenous people are still living traditional lifestyles and surviving in great intimacy with nature. In some places, these indigenous nations are the last line of defense between what we call development and our planet’s last remaining wilderness.”

-Cristina Mittermeier

An active conservation photographer who was suppressed by political scrutiny is Subhankar Banerjee. An Indian physicist and computer scientist, Banerjee worked at the Los Alamos National Laboratory and Boeing Corporation, before setting out to spend two years above the Arctic Circle, photographing the fragile ecosystems of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. His polar exploration led to his first book, *Seasons of Life and Land: Arctic National Wildlife Refuge,* published by Mountain Press, and a prominent exhibition was planned at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C. The spotlight turned to Banerjee on March 19, 2003, when California Senator Barbara Boxer introduced an amendment to prevent oil drilling in the Artic National Wildlife Refuge. During her arguments, she held up a copy of Banerjee’s book before the assembly and urged the senator to read it and to visit the upcoming Smithsonian exhibit before dismissing the region as a “flat white nothingness”, as it had been described by U.S. Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton. Following the Senate debate, the Smithsonian exhibits

department informed Banerjee that there was pressure to cancel the show, supposedly by ranks of Congress who supported oil drilling in Artic National Wildlife Reserve.

The exhibition was ultimately hung, but interpretive captions were removed and photographs were moved to an obscure basement hallway, rather than the prestigious gallery, Hall 10, where it was originally planned to show.

Political manipulation may have become a blessing for Banerjee and Artic National Wildlife Refuge due to the media attention the project received, including an article in *Vanity Fair* a multi-part series published in the *Washington Post* and thorough coverage on *National Public Radio*. But the ability of corporate interests to suppress the publication of photographs echoes the undercurrents and forewarns of the obstacles that conservation photographers face as they seek public and political influence.

RECAP

Throughout the 20th century, accelerating population growth and economic development destroyed the natural habitats of most of temperate zones of the northern hemisphere. Now the focus of destruction has shifted to mega-diverse tropical regions. The 25 regions of the world (or "hotspots", a concept developed by the British ecologist Norman Myers in the late 1980s)

that account for more than half of the planet's species have already lost around 90% of their natural habitat; this extraordinary biodiversity is now facing its last stand in a mere 1.4% of the world's land surface.

In this segment we have identified and understood the different terms – nature photography, wildlife photography, landscape photography and how they can all be eventually given a purpose in conservation photography. We have traced the beginning of conservation photography and looked at the difficulties involved. We have briefly acquainted ourselves with some of the finest photographers in the field and examples of how their work has and is continuing to shape the world we live in.

Finally, it is in the work of Brazilian photojournalist Sebastio Salgado that the tradition of conservation photography may find its most powerful proponent yet. In his ongoing ‘Genesis’ project, it seems conservation photography since Ansel Adams has come full circle.

He talks with awe of the resilience of the green sea turtles, the albatrosses that show such kindness to their life companions, and the sea lions so curious and affectionate that they lie down next to you, their body touching yours. His pictures resonate with hope, with purpose. "This is the point for me, that there is a hope. So many times I've photographed stories that show the degradation of the planet. I had one idea to go and photograph the factories that were polluting, and to see all the deposits of garbage. But, in the end, I thought the only way to give us an incentive, to bring hope, is

to show the pictures of the pristine planet - to see the innocence. And then we can understand what we must preserve," says photographer Salgado.

That is all we have for you today. Thank you and Goodbye.