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THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S FRAME

The allure of remote, wild places

text by Gary Brewer
photos by Gary & Donna Brewer



INTRODUCTION

Thanks to my parents, I grew up with a passion for natural history. I relished our collection of tattered *National Geographic* magazines, which lauded untamed, distant places where exotic animals roamed and resilient people subsisted. I gained an enthusiasm for the living world that led to university degrees and a rewarding career of research and administration in ecological and environmental sciences.

Nearly four decades ago I met an attractive woman, also a biologist, who shared similar interests in travel, ocean life, and wildlife conservation. Donna and I married and traveled as much as our careers, family, and finances allowed. From our professional backgrounds and personal observations, we knew that our natural world was changing—rapidly impacted by the overwhelming influence of humans. The sources of those changes were clear: the resource demands of a burgeoning human population, a warming planet (with associated sea level rise and ocean acidification), plastic and chemical pollution, overfishing, poorly regulated carbon and mineral extraction, unchecked industrial farming, and commercial development.

As professional environmental scientists, world travelers, and photographers we have explored many wild, remote places. We've seen firsthand how global changes driven by industrial development and pollution threaten human well-being around the world. Inhabitants we've met in wild, remote places have shared how they value and protect their homes, but they need help implementing such actions at effective scales. Sharing our experiences in this visual essay is our way of opening conversations to improve conservation and human well-being.

In 1991 we left our jobs and set sail on a journey around the world in what then became our only home: a sloop, 44 feet in length, that we called “first light.” We departed southern California, traveling

over 40,000 miles from 1991 to 1997, exploring the coastlines and interiors of dozens of islands and countries. The circumnavigation was an extraordinary adventure and unique education. We discovered remarkable places, people, and wildlife. After our return to the US we resumed full-time employment but continued to travel widely. Now in retirement, we want to share, through travel and wildlife photography, the allure of wild, remote places and their inhabitants.

Awe-inspiring tropical, temperate, and polar landscapes have left us humbled. We marveled at vibrant, spectacularly colorful coral reefs. The dozens of iconic species and hundreds of other unique varieties, alive in their natural habitats, brought us thrills and fulfillment—as well as tears for the many that are now threatened with extinction. We found joy in listening to the cacophony of wildlife voices, including the songs of insects, fishes, frogs, lemurs, and whales, calling for potential mates and vying for their place in a competitive, changing world. We also heard from a diversity of people—for whom the places that are “remote” and “wild” to us are, to them, their homelands—who would welcome assistance in preserving their traditions and wildlife heritage. We hope the public will listen to these collective cries and promote environmental safeguards that ensure the rights of wildlife and humans to survive and thrive. With optimism and a combination of science, medicine, compassion, and resilience, civilization will conquer the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, allowing fellow travelers on Earth to seek the personal enrichment that can come from interacting with, understanding, and caring for all living things, including people.

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overleaf

Russia's Commander Islands in the Bering Sea are often fogbound and blustery. Fortunately, we got a break in the weather. While we were not permitted to land, we spent several hours exploring the shoreline of Bering Island where we came across this young Arctic blue fox, an endemic subspecies.



Polar bears are icons of the far north and represent a “poster child” for impacts caused by Arctic warming. We witnessed this bear off the coast of Norway’s Svalbard Archipelago as it waited for a seal to reappear among the patches of disappearing sea ice.



In Kenya, Maasai women are empowered by selling their handicrafts. Ecotourism throughout Africa supports such activities and also bolsters the work of park rangers and local wildlife guides who protect wildlife from poaching and educate tourists about wildlife conservation.



Several dozen lemur species, like these ring-tailed, are endemic to Madagascar. One-third of them are considered critically endangered, primarily as a result of logging and habitat destruction.



The eradication of introduced rodents, cats, goats, and pigs continues on New Zealand and Australian Subantarctic Islands. As a result, seabird nesting success is on the rise, helping to ensure that albatross like this Chatham Island mollymawk will prosper and continue to delight birders who are fortunate to see these amazing birds dip and soar effortlessly over the chaotic Southern Ocean.



On Lake Albert, Murchison National Park, Uganda, our local expert wildlife guide spotted a distant shoebill and we were able to get a close look at this unmistakable, bizarre-looking bird as it stalked the shoreline in search of fish.



We found this giant *Tridacna* clam, over three feet in length, on a shallow, protected reef in Papua New Guinea. It is a classic indicator of healthy reef systems. Based on its slow growth and size, the mollusk had remained unmolested for several decades filtering harmful bacteria and viruses from the sea.



The Kingdom of Bhutan is a land of gentle people, near-pristine forests, snowcapped mountain peaks (several considered sacred and reportedly unclimbed), and deep, V-shaped valleys with free-flowing rivers. The entire country is a vast wildlife refuge. Mountains harbor the uncommon, stunning satyr tragopan, which displays its finery in the early morning, without harassment from hunters.



The greater adjutant is a huge, inelegant stork on the verge of extinction resulting from destruction of their historical nesting and feeding habitats. This image was captured in the Brahmaputra Valley in Assam, India, where the birds forage in urban garbage dumps, apparently scavenging anything remotely edible, including carrion. Inadvertent poisoning and ingestion of plastic may contribute to their decline.



Palm oil plantations and logging have destroyed thousands of square miles of lush tropical forests on the island of Borneo, including critical habitat for species threatened with extinction, such as orangutan. Eye-to-eye contact with this mature male orangutan instilled an indelible memory of this intelligent, cognizant relative of humans.



In remote islands of Fiji, Donna and I were welcomed, “adopted,” and educated by multigenerational families. We learned how to tend gardens and cook, and were instructed (by local elders) on how to sustain healthy coral reefs: by not overfishing.



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Parks Stewardship Forum explores innovative thinking and offers enduring perspectives on critical issues of place-based heritage management and stewardship. Interdisciplinary in nature, the journal gathers insights from all fields related to parks, protected areas, cultural sites, and other place-based forms of conservation. The scope of the journal is international. It is dedicated to the legacy of [George Meléndez Wright](#), a graduate of UC Berkeley and pioneer in conservation of national parks.

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On the cover of this issue

A montage of images from [One Tam](#), a collaborative partnership to manage the landscape of Mount Tamalpais in California, along with one from Alcatraz Island in Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

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