

# The Robin Hood of Wildlife Photography





An IT job holder who never thought he would be a wildlife photographer has won multiple awards in this field and currently conducts his own wildlife photography tours and travels across the globe.

As a part of RHATC's Follow The Leader sessions we were privileged to interact with Sachin Rai who took us into his journey of wildlife photography.

Sachin Rai was born and brought up in Mumbai. Growing up, he was always interested in nature and wildlife but had no choice but to take up commerce after school like most of the people back then. Right after his 12th he started teaching computer courses as he loved teaching and did his Bachelor's in Commerce as a distance course. As he was well versed with computers and photoshop by then he immediately got into Dotcom, an IT company. He never had much of a social life and had no clue where to spend his earnings. He came across a tour conducted by WWF in 1999 and enrolled himself into it. He was introduced to wildlife by Kedar Gore – director of the Corbett Foundation, when he attended the tour by WWF to the Sundarbans. Back then, he felt identifying a Vulture was difficult and was in sheer surprise when he heard people identifying a Pygmy Woodpecker. Throughout the tour he was glued to the edge of the boat with excitement to learn about wildlife. This event he reckons was the opening point into exploring his passion for wildlife. He quotes, "it is extremely important who introduces you to wildlife".

Since then, he started spending his time and money for wildlife tours and got an SLR with a film roll camera by his second trip. He recalled how hard it was using those cameras because of limited shots in a reel and unable to view the photo until developed in the dark room unlike the cameras we have now which have the magical button to delete pictures we do not need and it costs nothing to do it. While working as a web designer at Dotcom he followed his passion for wildlife photography simultaneously and got to travel to different parts of the country. He started off with







the birds then got into mammals, reptiles, and then frogs and it goes on. He was perplexed at the fact that not much work had been done on frogs and that there were no proper reference pictures for frogs back then.

Though he loved to be a web designer and enjoyed his time in IT he wanted to pursue wildlife as a full-time career. He picked up photography very seriously for the documentation purpose and never considers himself to be a professional photographer because he does not sell his photographs. Realizing the love he has towards teaching, he wanted to connect it to wildlife to make a living. His career growth in wildlife photography happened in 2007 when he won the first and second prizes in Sanctuary Asia which got him a lot of fame and people started approaching him for his photography tours. Taking that as a good opportunity he completely switched his career to wildlife photography from being a web designer.

For the last 15 years he has been conducting wildlife photography tours across the globe and he also promotes the brands he is associated with on his Instagram handle. He finds travelling to multiple places for his work very fascinating. During the photography tours he sensitizes the clients about the wildlife and the need for conservation.

His awareness sessions got many of his clients to raise funds for NGOs working for wildlife conservation.

In an hour Sachin made us travel to some of the most amazing places across the world which are close to his heart.

Starting from India where he screened his photographs of

- Malabar Pied Hornbills locking beaks which got him the second prize in Sanctuary Asia in 2007. Until then the behavior of locking beaks in Malabar Pied Hornbills wasn't seen.
- Ward's Trogon – Phantom of the forest, from Arunachal Pradesh which got him first

prize making him shift the career.

- Bengal Tiger stalking its prey.
- Desert Fox in ravine lands from Rajasthan which are sadly considered as wastelands and are being converted by the government.
- Male Rat Snakes combating for a mate in Kabini which was an action-oriented picture.







- Bengal Tigers and Rhinos in the same grassland in Kaziranga, and
- Tigers in the mating ritual in Ranthambore in a palace which was used to hunt the Tigers years ago but now is taken over by Tigers for their mating.

- *Raorchestes jayarami* – Jayaram Bush Frog, which is the only species named after a wildlife photographer.
- Wrinkled frog eggs in Amboli.
- Cicada coming out of its molt.
- Stump-tailed Macaque from Assam.
- Asian Elephant from Jim Corbett.

He always looked up to Nick Nichols – an American wildlife photographer, as an inspiration. He added, the beauty of photography is that no one can replicate the pictures and photography is learned through experience. He never restricted himself to



any species and photographed everything under the Sun. He talks to his clients about wildlife through storytelling which has a greater impact on them.

From the photographs of India, he then moved to Kenya and showed us,

- African Elephants while speaking about the importance of the landscape.
- Black Rhinos from Nakuru. There are White and Black Rhinos in that landscape, he shared, funny how both of these species are actually grey in colour but they got those names because the White Rhinos actually

- Wildebeests jumping in water.
- Vultures waiting for the Wildebeests as they were in huge groups unable to cross the river, slipping off into the river and drowning, making it easy for the Crocodiles to hunt.

Then he moved to Tanzania showing us,

- Zebras, and
- Wildebeests with a just born calf. We got to know that Wildebeests migrate south to Tanzania following the rain for the grass and at Ngorongoro all the pregnant Wildebeests give birth to young ones in a span of 10 days where a lot of hunting scenes by Cheetahs,



have wide square shaped lips as they are grass eaters and the Britishers for the sake of ease called it White Rhino and the other species were given the complementary name, the Black Rhino who have a curled lip because they are leaf eating species.

- African Lions from Nakuru.
- Thomson's Gazelles.
- Lions from Mara.

Lions, and Leopards can be witnessed.

Next place was Ndutu,

- Bat-eared Fox and
- Cheetahs with cubs.

Then to Ethiopia, land full of endemic species where we were shown,

- Walia Ibex.
- Spot-breasted Lapwing.
- Blue-winged Goose.
- Nyala.
- Gelada, and



- Ethiopian Wolf who only eats rodents.
- Then to Madagascar – the land of chameleons, where we got to see,
- Red Ruffed Lemur.
  - Black and White Ruffed Lemur.
  - Indri.
  - Parson's Chameleon which is the world's biggest chameleon.
  - Brown Leaf Chameleon.
  - Green Bright-eyed Frog, and
  - Fossa which is the only predator of the Island.

Next was a beautiful Island called Borneo – home for the oldest rainforests in the world, which is owned by Malaysia and Indonesia where rapid deforestation is happening and only a little patch of forests on either side of rivers flowing there. But in those little patches live

- Orangutans – the man of the forest, who are very calm primates and pluck only the ripened fruits without even looking at them to eat.
- Proboscis Monkey.
- Lantern fly.
- Crested Fireback.
- Malayan Horned Frog who is very huge and croaks like a truck horn, and
- Cinnamon Frog.

Then came Pantanal where we saw,

- Jaguars peeping through the water.
- Giant River Otter.
- Giant Anteater.
- Bare-faced Curassow with its amazing hairdo.
- Agami Heron, and
- Red and green macaws in flight.

Next stop was Costa Rica, a dream place for any wildlife photographer. But sadly, it is also a place where the locals have fake setups for wildlife photography.

- Keel-billed Toucan.
- Chlorophonia.
- Talamanca Hummingbird.
- Green Hermit.
- Long-tongued Bat, and
- Blue Jeans Frog.

And the last place screened was Kamchatka, a small island in Russia. Only twelve people can stay on the island at a time and for a maximum of three nights. The tourists are



put in cages to see the Brown Bears. He showed us

- Kamchatka Brown Bears who fish in the river and the cubs wait on the banks for the mothers and
- Arctic Fox.

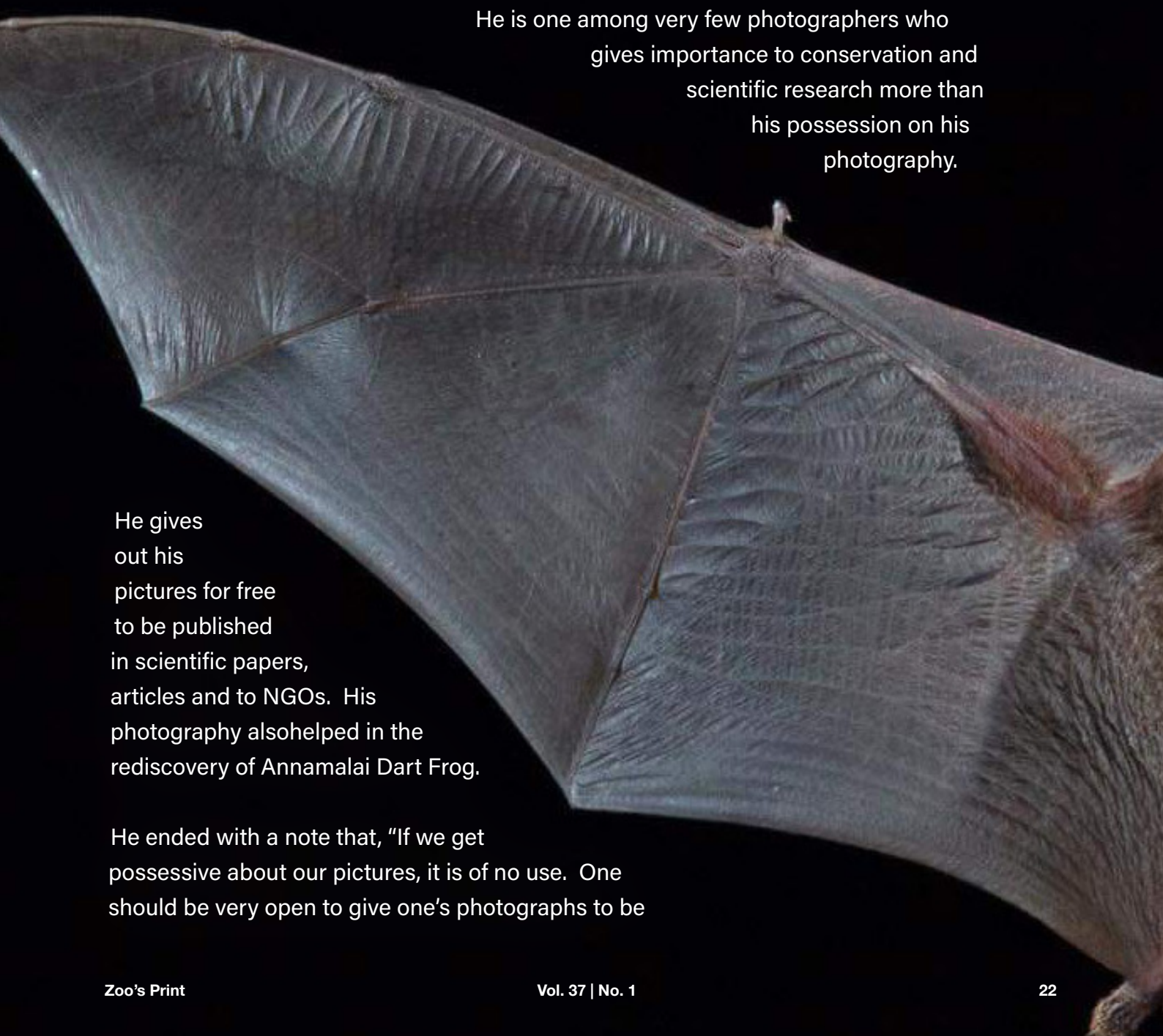
The stories his photographs carried were very invigorating. The excitement Sachin had during the whole talk never went low. The way he described the grasslands, spoke about animal behaviors shows what a beautiful story teller he is. Listening to him

feels as if we are in that scenario looking at the live animals rather than looking at his pictures. He is an ethical and easily approachable wildlife photographer who feels privileged in teaching people. He feels sad that in this era of social media where posting pictures have no restrictions, many wildlife photographers click pictures by unethical means such as capturing animal, using excessive flash on frogs, handling and placing the animal outside its natural habitat just for an aesthetic background, placing prey and predator together to get the feeding shot and many more. He and his fellow wildlife photographers often discuss do's and don'ts of wildlife photography on Conservation India website run by Ramki eight years ago. He now and then drops messages to the wildlife photographers if he comes across any unethical photo and most of them respond in a positive way.

He is one among very few photographers who gives importance to conservation and scientific research more than his possession on his photography.

He gives out his pictures for free to be published in scientific papers, articles and to NGOs. His photography also helped in the rediscovery of Annamalai Dart Frog.

He ended with a note that, "If we get possessive about our pictures, it is of no use. One should be very open to give one's photographs to be





used and that is the least we can do for wildlife”.

He is definitely a Robin Hood of wildlife photography who won Wildlife Photographer of The Year- Sanctuary Asia in 2007, Second prize- Sanctuary Asia in 2007, Special mention- Sanctuary Asia in 2007, Special mention- Better photography in 2008, Special mention- Sanctuary Asia in 2009, Special mention- Sanctuary Asia in 2009, Wildlife Photographer of The Year- DJ Memorial Photography Contest in 2013, Third prize- Sanctuary Asia in 2014, and Wildlife Photographer of The Year- DJ Memorial Photography Contest in 2017. Plethora of awards, and we are sure many more will come down his way. But it matters not, to a person whose joy lies in sharing the stories behind his photographs.



**Aakanksha Komanduri**  
RHATC Fellow, 2021–22, Zoo Outreach  
Organization, Coimbatore, TN, India.