



Photographer Luke Massey blends creativity with conservation and says he soaks up knowledge 'like a sponge'. He shares his opinions on the natural world and reveals how he uses his skills to make a difference

Drinking it in—



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his fish-eye-lens shot of an orphaned sun bear just two months old may be cute, but the story behind it is far from sweet. 'A week earlier he would have been roaming around the Indonesian jungle with his mother,' says Luke Massey, as he explains that the young bear was taken so he could be sold to a zoo. Massey, a wildlife photographer and camera operator for natural history documentaries, says the trader making the deal was arrested, but for every success story, there are thousands that slide under the radar of police. 'The illegal wildlife trade is now bigger than the drug trade, and second only to the arms trade,' says Massey. 'You can do your bit by never having your picture taken with a slow loris at the floating market in Bangkok, never going to the tiger temples and never taking an elephant ride. If everyone boycotts these awful attractions, they'll die out.' ●



'I'm willing to put myself in dangerous situations to highlight issues'

#### Get a detective's nose for a story

I saw an amazing shot on Instagram of falcons nesting on a Chicago skyscraper balcony, and messaged the owner of the apartment to ask if I could shoot them. Falcons were almost extinct in the 80s and nobody could have predicted they'd make a comeback nesting on skyscrapers, which are like a cliff habitat. There are now 20 breeding pairs in Chicago alone.



**Keep a cool head.** The Iberian lynx is the rarest cat in the world, so when we went to Spain last year it took us two months to find one. I was lining up the shot and there was a grass stem in the way, so I took a step to the left. Always think about your

frame, even when you're madly excited.

**I won the Urban category at 2016's Wildlife Photographer of the Year awards** with an image of meat being tossed to kites in Delhi. Locals in the Muslim Quarter feed the kites as a mark of giving to those less fortunate, which seems like an ideal way to help Delhi's 30,000 breeding pairs of kites thrive. But it's being done in the afternoon, when locals fly paper kites. I worked with a bird rehab clinic, and over 90 per cent of the kites they treat are hurt in collisions with the kite strings. Locals are now being asked to only feed the kites in the morning.

**Wildlife black markets are shocking.** There's a saying in Indonesia that a man is only a 'real man' once he has a house, a wife, a horse, a dagger and a bird in a cage. So it's tradition for most households to have a caged bird. I once saw a pair of javan green magpies in a market, a critically endangered

species. Seeing them at a weekend market was like seeing an amur leopard for sale at a car boot sale.

**I get funny looks going through airport security,** as I have cable ties and tape in my bag, like a serial killer might! I use them for attaching cameras and flashes to trees. I also always have bird seed or dried dog food, for attracting birds or foxes. It's sometimes frowned upon, but as long as the creature doesn't become dependent on it, I don't see the issue.

**I never complain about life in the UK now.** I once spent a morning shooting on Delhi's biggest rubbish

dump. I was retching every few steps, yet there were seven-year-old kids combing the heaps for scraps to sell. They'll probably do that all their lives and only live to 40. I think the 'I can't go on holiday this year' unhappiness we see in the UK is a result of consumerism. The happiest people I've met were the islanders of Moturiki, in Fiji. When I first visited, they had no electricity, they lived off the land and sea, and hung out with each other. No hot showers, but a coral reef to swim in. Then the government gave them solar panels. Now, some of the islanders have TVs and fridges, while others can't afford them. It's created a 'keeping up with the Joneses' divide. When I returned, they didn't seem as happy.

#### IN FOCUS

- Leave a little patch of your garden wild, rather than paving it or putting down a lawn. Plant wildflowers, if there are none. You'll see a lot more wildlife.
- Find someone objective to choose your best shots. My girlfriend, also a photographer, edits my work. My favourite shots don't win awards.

**Use the long waits to quiz local guides.** I spent three months tracking a leopard family in South Luangwa National Park. I'd often wait for three hours while the leopards slept. My Zambian guides were hilarious and full of knowledge about the wildlife, so I used the opportunity to soak it up like a sponge. You can predict the shot better, once you understand the species.

**If I could only choose one shooting location, it would be Zambia.** There's something about African light. We only get really spectacular golden light once or twice a year in the UK. They get it



practically daily. Last time I was there, I tried new technology that lets you take better quality stills while shooting video footage. Often I'll think, 'Agh, this would make a great still' while I'm shooting video, or vice versa. Now you can get 30 8-megapixel stills a second, which is just incredible.

**London could become a wildlife haven.** I'd love to see tax breaks for green roofs there. There's a solicitors' office a stone's throw from St Paul's with a roof garden that has rare black redstarts nesting in it. From a helicopter, you can see that London is a sea of gravel-covered roofs. If every building in London planted a wildflower patch on their roof, it would only cost around £1,000 each, and we could have a prettier city full of wildlife and birdsong.

**I'm a conservationist before I'm a photographer.** I'm willing to put myself in dangerous situations to highlight issues such as underground wildlife markets. I often go out with activists who have been shot at, and I've seen police beaten up. But I feel like my camera protects me. It girds me with an 'I have a job to do' determination. The quote that keeps me going is from Sir Peter Scott, who was a founder of the World Wide Fund for Nature. He said, 'We shan't save all we should like to, but we shall save a great deal more than if we had never tried.'

You can follow Luke on Instagram @lmasseyimages, or visit his website at lmasseyimages.com

■ If you'd like to comment on the issues raised, email [bbcearthmagazine@therivergroup.co.uk](mailto:bbcearthmagazine@therivergroup.co.uk)

### Don't shy away from tough issues

In Cyprus, the killing of blackcap birds to make *ambelopoulia*, an illegal local delicacy where the songbirds are served pickled, grilled or boiled, is a highly organised operation.

In remote areas, trappers play birdsong out of huge speakers at night to draw the birds into their nets. The industry turns a profit of 15 million euros a year. The trapper who killed these black caps was arrested, thankfully, and the 20 remaining birds were released.



### Give it time

The adult male on the left should be killing the cub on the right, because despite being his half-brother, the cub could grow up to be a threat. Instead, he's playing with him affectionately. A very rare behaviour to capture. Rather than frantically shooting and moving on, sit back and wait for scenes like these to unfold.