





Photographing the Smaller Majority

During the last ten years, I have spent a considerable amount of time working as an entomologist in various tropical destinations on projects involving biology and conservation of insects and other invertebrates. What started as an attempt to simply document some of these organisms with a camera my wife had surprised me with one Christmas day quickly developed into a photographic passion for capturing all things small and overlooked by many nature photographers. Very early on I discovered that it gives me immensely more satisfaction to lower my lens and look for animals hiding on the forest floor than to take a picture of an elephant or toucan, subjects that have already been expertly photographed. I also realized that by focusing my attention on smaller organisms I had gained access to a hidden, unexplored treasure trove of nature, full of exquisite gems of colors, shapes, and unique behaviors. To understand my fascination with smaller animals try this simple exercise: imagine a herd of elephants, but one in which each animal is only the size of your fingernail. Imagine looking at them from above as they walk around your feet. Pretty unremarkable gray specks, wouldn't you agree? Now imagine a preying mantis the size



of an actual elephant—isn't it the most spectacular creature you have ever seen? My point is that once you remove the element of size, you will start noticing the overwhelming variety and beauty of small animals that share this planet with us, revealing a diversity of forms most people do not realize exists.

Capturing this smaller majority of life on film, while not without its challenges, is not as difficult as you might think. Taking pictures of minute organisms is really not that different from other types of photography, and with the help of a few accessories you will be able to enter the exciting realm of tiger beetles, ant lions, and giraffe weevils. To find subjects for macrophotography you do not need to travel far. Your own garden is full of inhabitants you never knew were there, and a nearby meadow or forest will provide enough subjects to satisfy even the most de-

manding nature photographer. But it is the tropics where you will find some of the most amazing creatures that have ever walked the Earth, and if you have a chance to do so, I encourage you to take a photographic trip there.

Day One in the Rainforest

Of all habitats in the tropics, rainforests are probably the most challenging places for a nature photographer, but at the same time they may also be the most rewarding. First-time visitors frequently exhibit one of two types of reaction in their encounter with the rainforest environment. One group includes those who expect a zoo or a tropical paradise, and find themselves disappointed by the lack of multitudes of gorgeous flowers hanging from every branch or herds of animals lurking behind every tree. The image of the rainforest most of us have in mind has been shaped by years of natural history documentaries and books such as this one, which condense years of research and observations. In real life, chances are that you will see few flowers (although those that you will see may be spectacular), and larger animals will appear as small, fleeting shadows high in the canopy.

Visitors in the second group find themselves completely overwhelmed by the richness and diversity of the forest. These are the people who do not expect to see the few well-publicized rainforest icons, such as jaguars or orangutans, but instead are open to every single life form and experience of their trip. I remember well the sensory overload of my first visit to a Malaysian rainforest. The thing