

## A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

By ARTHUR C. CLARKE

# Sri Lanka's

**A** WORLD that contained only human beings would not be worth living in, nor would it be habitable very long. This is a lesson that our urban-centered, technologically orientated culture is painfully relearning, though our ancestors knew it well enough. A holy man once told the ruler of Ceylon: "O great King, the birds of the air and the beasts have as equal a right to live and move about in any part of this land as thou. The land belongs to the people and all living beings; thou art only the guardian of it."

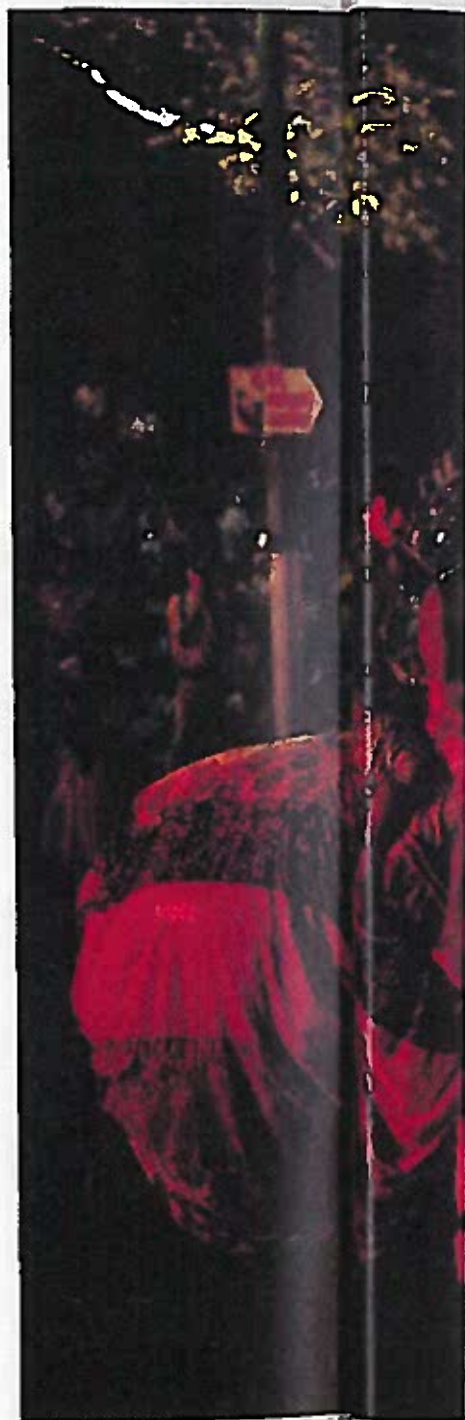
That was 23 centuries ago, when coexistence of man and beast presented few problems. But in the past 25 years the human population of Ceylon—now Sri Lanka—has almost doubled. Though the small Indian Ocean island is not yet overcrowded, and much of its natural beauty is still intact, it provides textbook examples of many modern dilemmas: development versus environment; farm versus forest; indigenous culture versus tourism. There are countless beautiful, harmless, and often valuable creatures whose very existence is now threatened by greed, indifference, or ignorance. The elephant is, of course, the most spectacular of Sri Lanka's animals; its enormous appetite for succulent greenstuff puts it into direct competition with the farmer, who may be ruined overnight by a marauding herd—and can one blame him if he loads a blunderbuss with rusty nails to protect his crops? Fortunately the elephant is probably safe from extinction (pages 274-8).

But remembering what happened to the passenger pigeon in the United States less than a century ago, one cannot help fearing for Sri Lanka's smaller animals as the forests are cleared, coral reefs smashed to make lime, and land, air, and water polluted by the new industrial estates. Those creatures that thrive in man-made environments seem to be the less admired species: crows, rats, cockroaches. The beautiful birds and butterflies, the shy loris, the handsome leopard and its elegant prey, the spotted deer, all vanish before the advancing bulldozer.

It has been wisely said that in wilderness is the preservation of the world. For as King Devanampiya Tissa was told three centuries before the birth of Christ, we are its guardians—*not* its owners. \* \* \*

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Author of both fiction and nonfiction works, and a longtime conservationist, British writer Arthur C. Clarke lives and works in Sri Lanka.



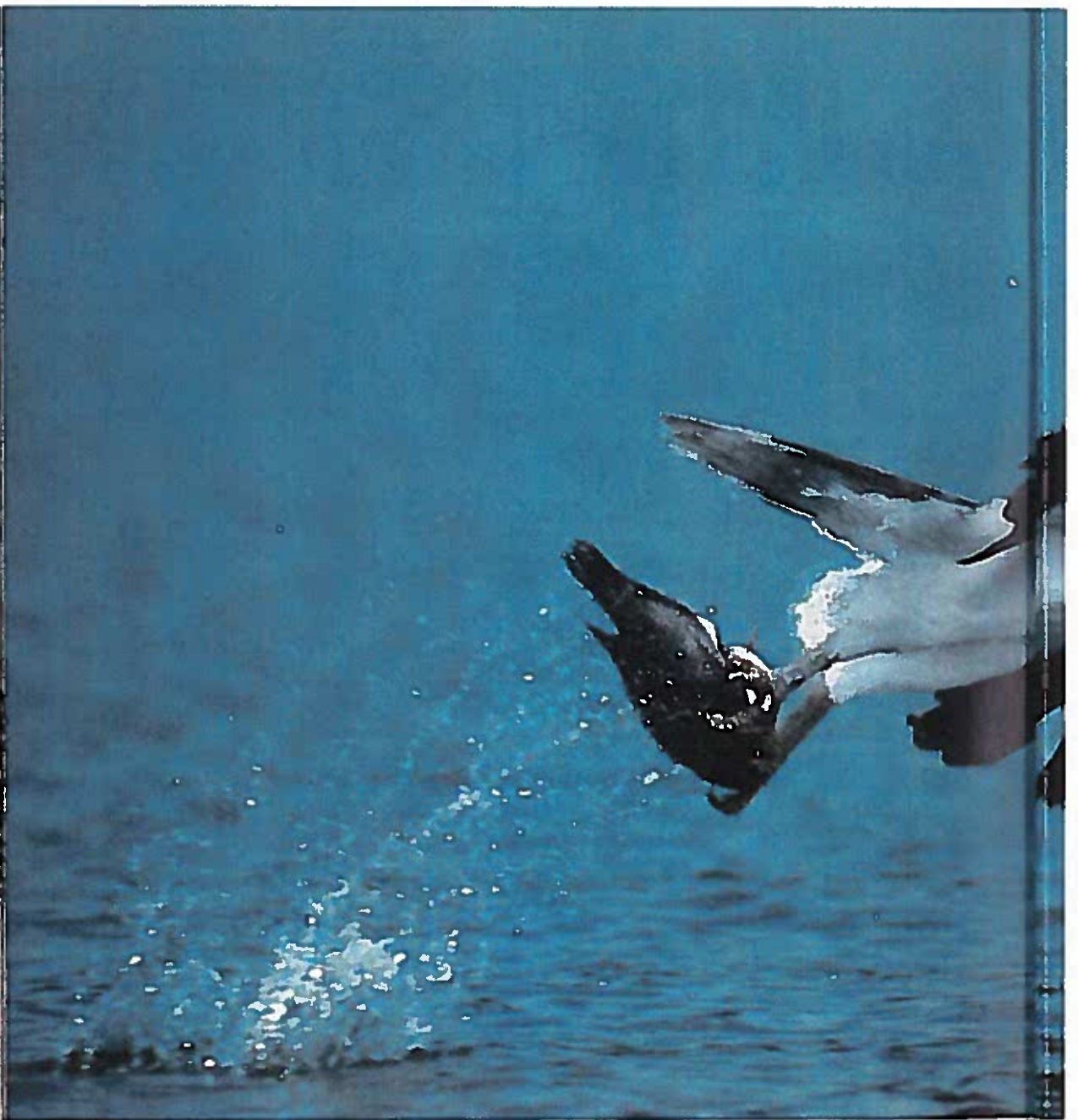
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# Wildlife Heritage



Entrusted with holy duty, elephants parade with a Buddhist relic in Kandy during the Esala Perahera festival.

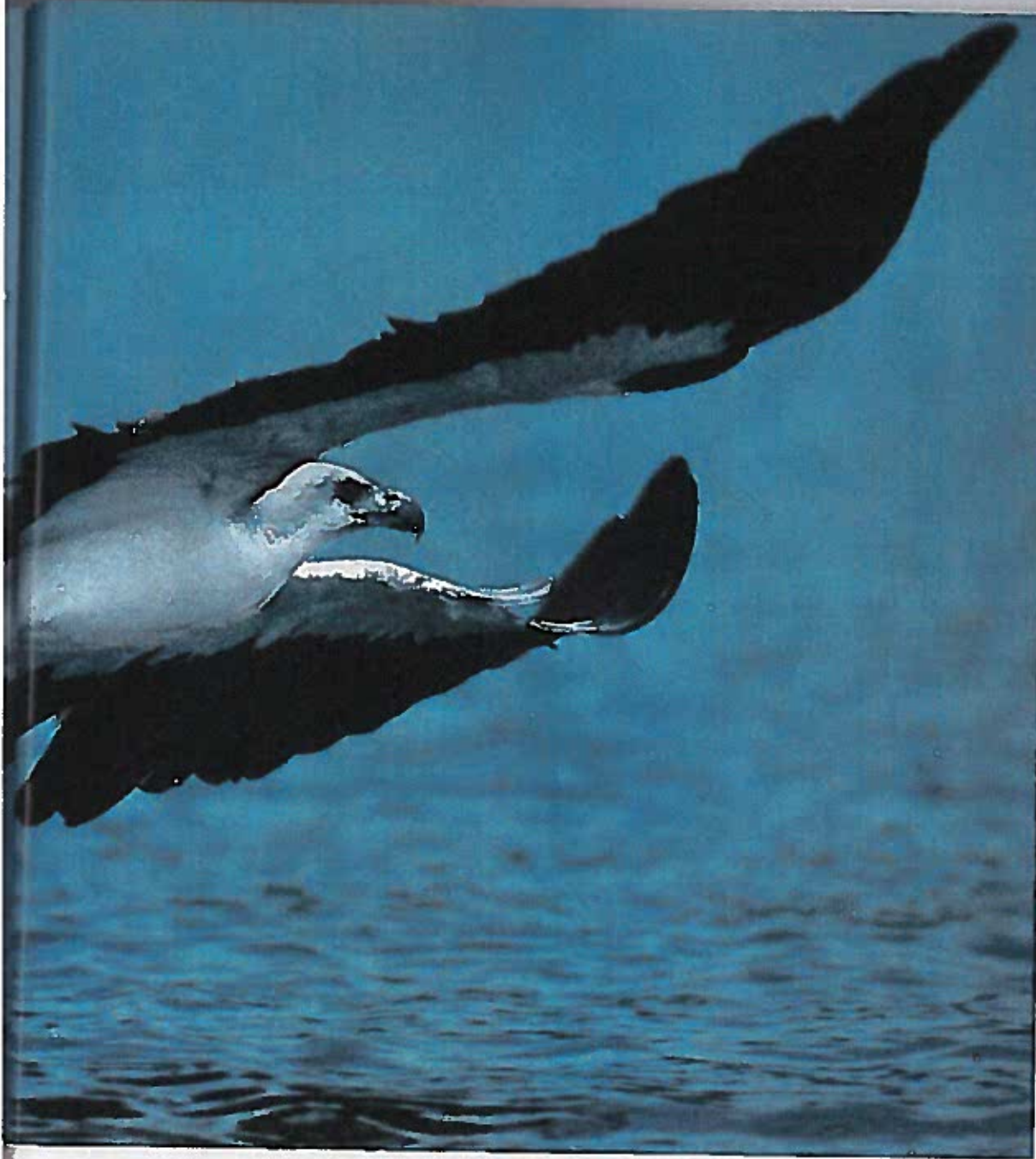
DIETEN AND MARY PLAGE



SRI LANKA'S WILDLIFE

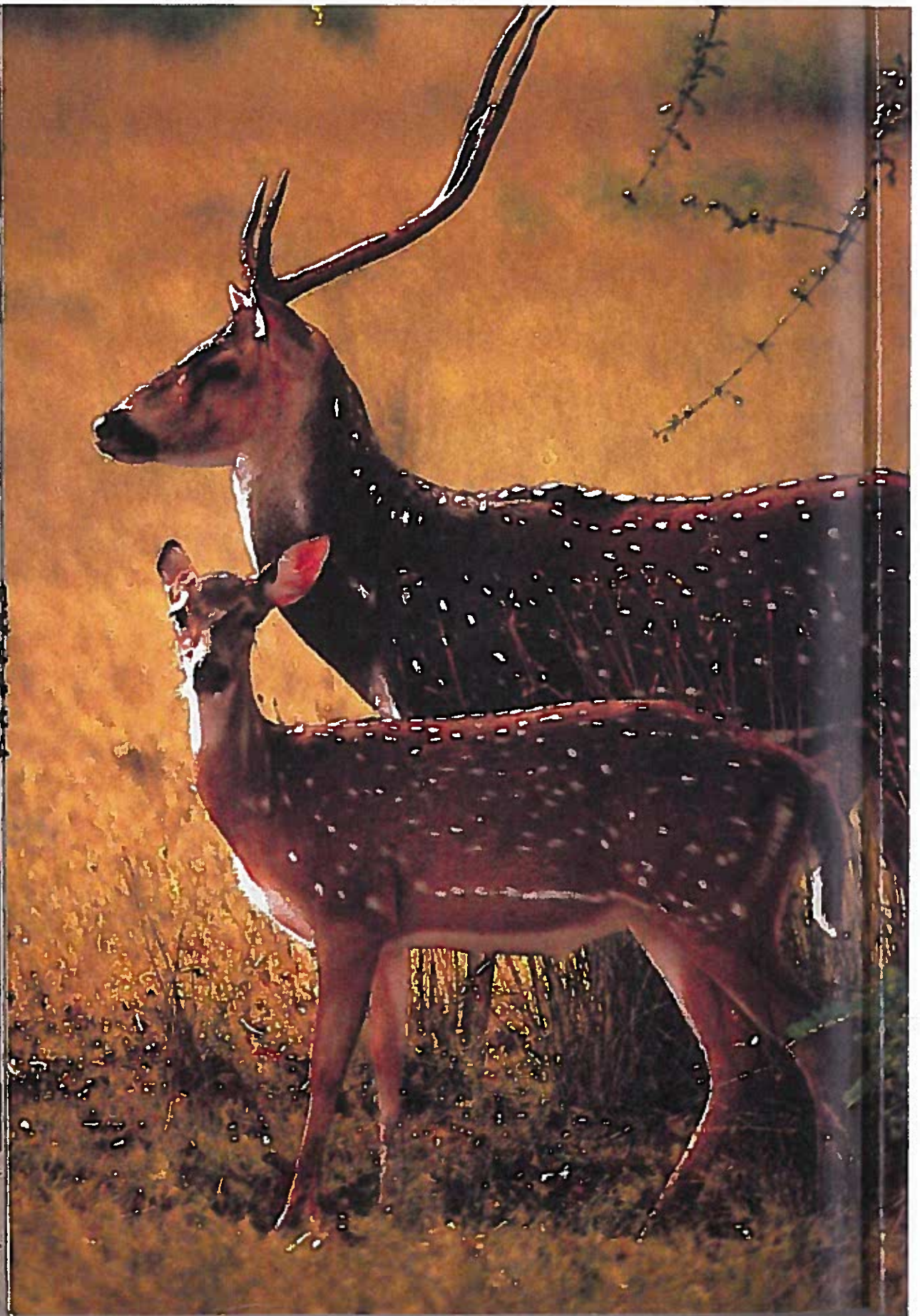
*Legacy of Lively  
Treasures*

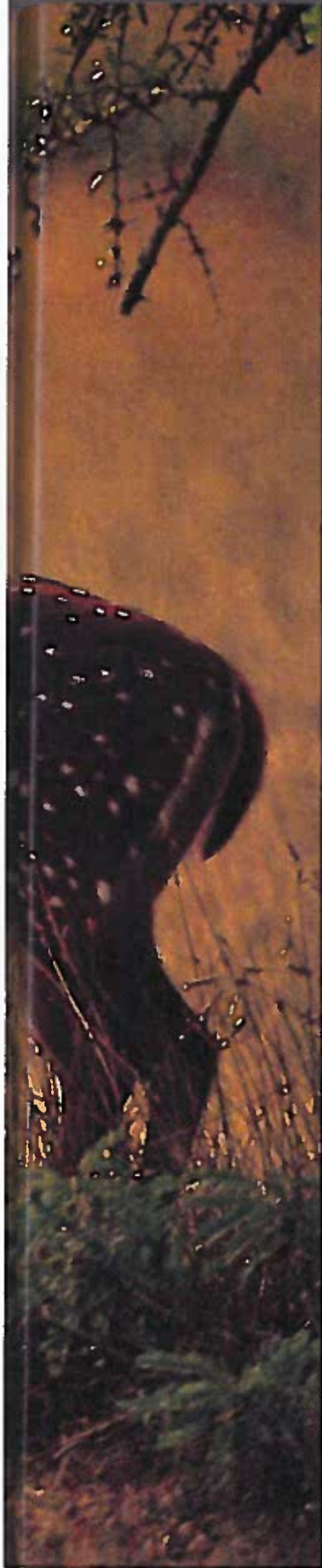
Photo essay by DIETER and MARY PLAGE



**P**ERFECTION IN FLIGHT, a white-bellied sea eagle soars aloft with a fish in Sri Lanka's Gal Oya National Park. A centuries-old, Buddhist-inspired tradition of wildlife preservation strengthens the bird's stand in an island nation that boasts a network of national parks and sanctuaries.







**H**ANDSOME in new antlers, a spotted deer in Wilpattu National Park (*left*) guards one of the many does he will mate with during the year. This Asian deer abounds in Sri Lanka's parks and helps nourish a thriving leopard population.

A diminutive chevrotain,

or mouse deer (*top*), cowers in its nest at six weeks as its parents, no more than a foot tall, try to lure the two of us away.

Unaware of our cameras, a young black-naped hare (*above*) nuzzles a sprig in Gal Oya, perhaps reassured by the scent of its parents, off on a food-gathering mission.





**I**N THE FURY of combat, white-bellied sea eagles (far left) lock talons and cartwheel like acrobats before disengaging 100 feet above the Gal Oya reservoir. The mature eagle, at bottom, instigated this rarely observed dogfighting when the juvenile violated the adult's territory and snagged a fish.

When attacked, the juvenile dropped its dinner, only to see a spotted-billed pelican (above) scoop it from the water and flee. Thereupon the adult eagle took up the chase and landed near the pelicans' perch (left). But too late. Having swallowed the evidence, the interloper joined with its mate in a duet of impressive gesturing.

The man-made, fish-stocked Gal Oya reservoir lures these coastal-dwelling eagles and pelicans inland to nest. A few dozen licensed commercial fishermen also ply the reservoir, built to supply water to this dry southeastern section.





**N**IGHT STALKER stakes its ground in Wilpattu National Park. Fleet and industrious despite its name, a sloth bear (*above*) digs with razor claws for ants and termites, its favorite foods. Those claws and an unpredictable nature make the bear among the most feared of Asian jungle animals. Poor of eyesight and hearing, it charges wildly upon detecting any unfamiliar scent.

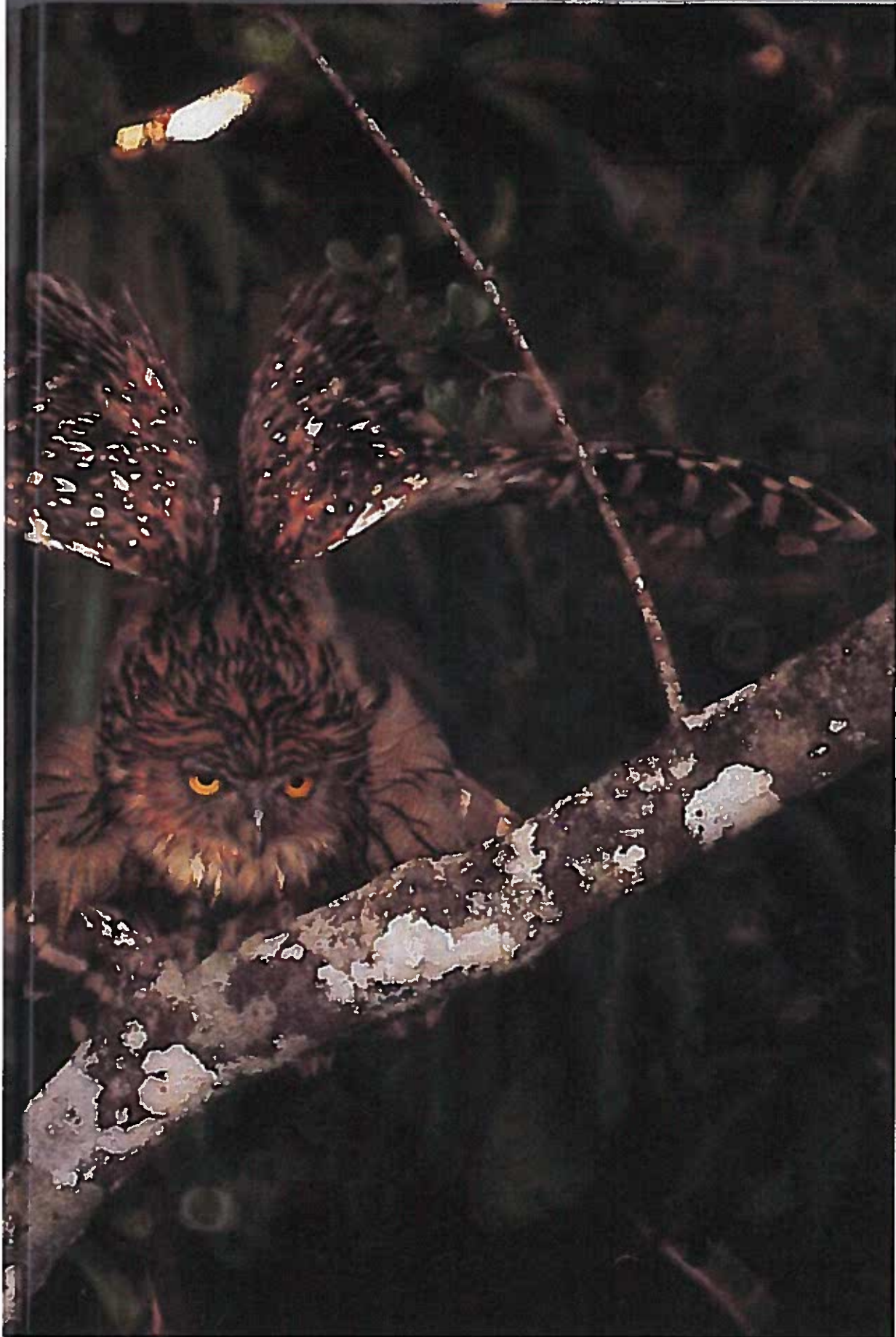
Stretching and preening at a water hole, a brown fish owl (*right*) nevertheless keeps a sharp eye out for its prey. We spotted the nearly hidden owl from 50 yards.

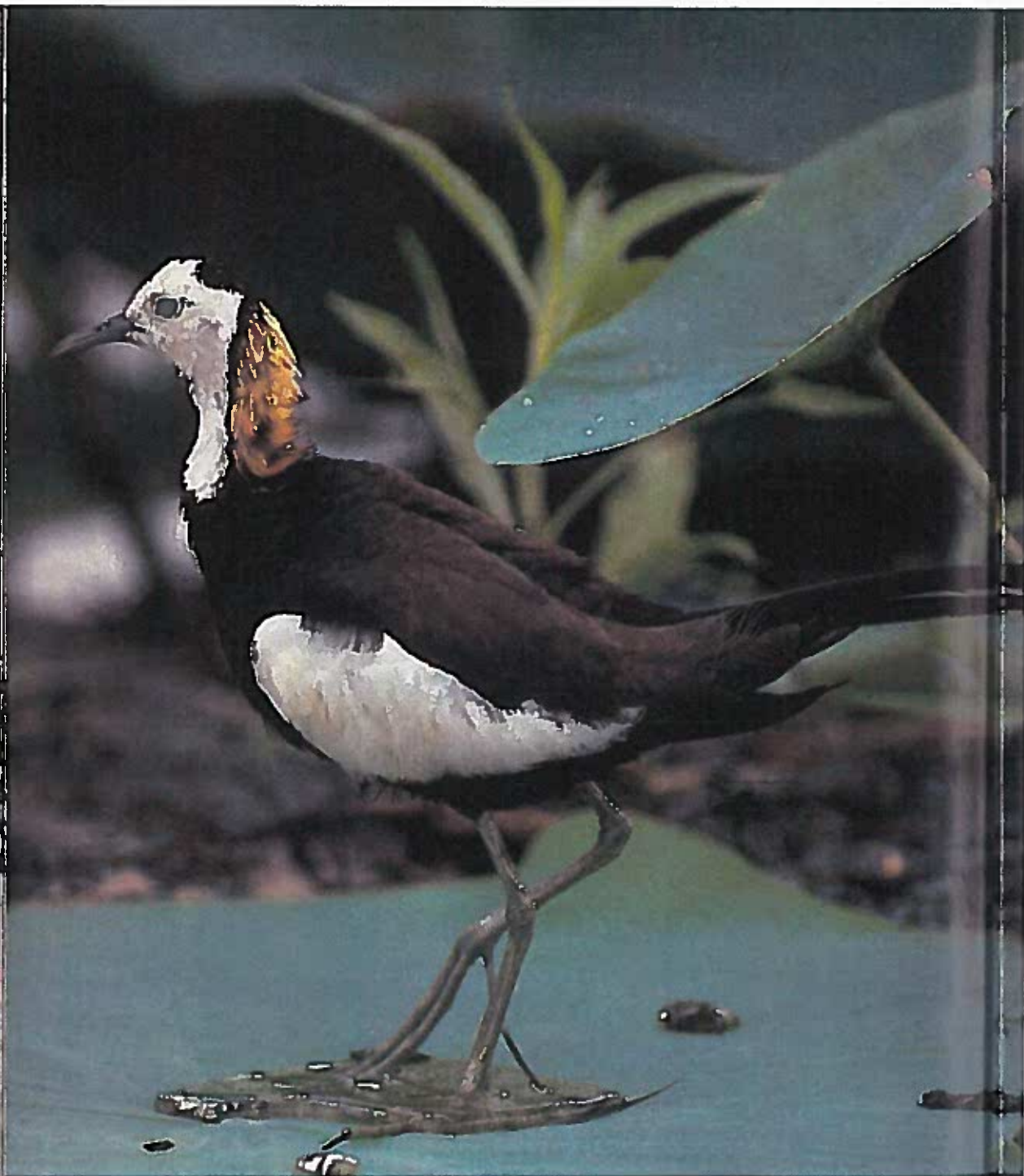
With 505 square miles, Wilpattu is Sri Lanka's largest park. The island devotes 10 percent of its acreage to parklands, the largest percentage in Asia.

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Acclaimed wildlife photographers and filmmakers, the husband-and-wife team of Dieter and Mary Plage explored Sri Lanka's protected lands for nearly two years. "You learn to understand jungle noises," Dieter explains. "Once you train your ear to your surroundings, animals become obvious."



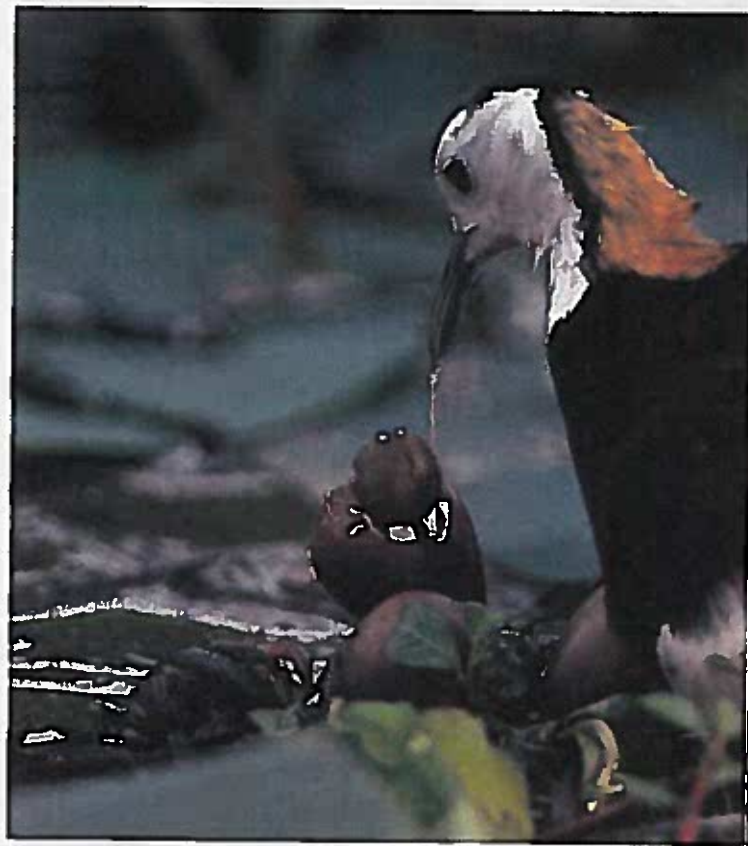




**N**O PARTNER helps this parent, a male pheasant-tailed jacana (above), strutting on lotus leaves near his floating nest in Yala East National Park. The female deserts her mate and seeks a new partner after laying three or four eggs, arranged to

prevent them from rolling out of the shallow nest of debris.

For 26 days the male incubates the eggs, folding his wings like a cradle beneath them. Then he shepherds his new brood for about three months. The father eyes his newly emerged firstborn (top right),



who shortly sets out (bottom right) to test the oversize feet that enable jacanas to distribute weight and walk on floating vegetation. Only minutes later disaster struck. A pond heron snatched the chick while father's back was turned as he helped another chick emerge.

But it is our observation that the jacana's early-warning system usually foils such abductions. If a heron or sea eagle threatens, father sounds a chirp and the chicks dive, pushing their beaks to the surface for air. When danger passes, he chirps again and the chicks return.



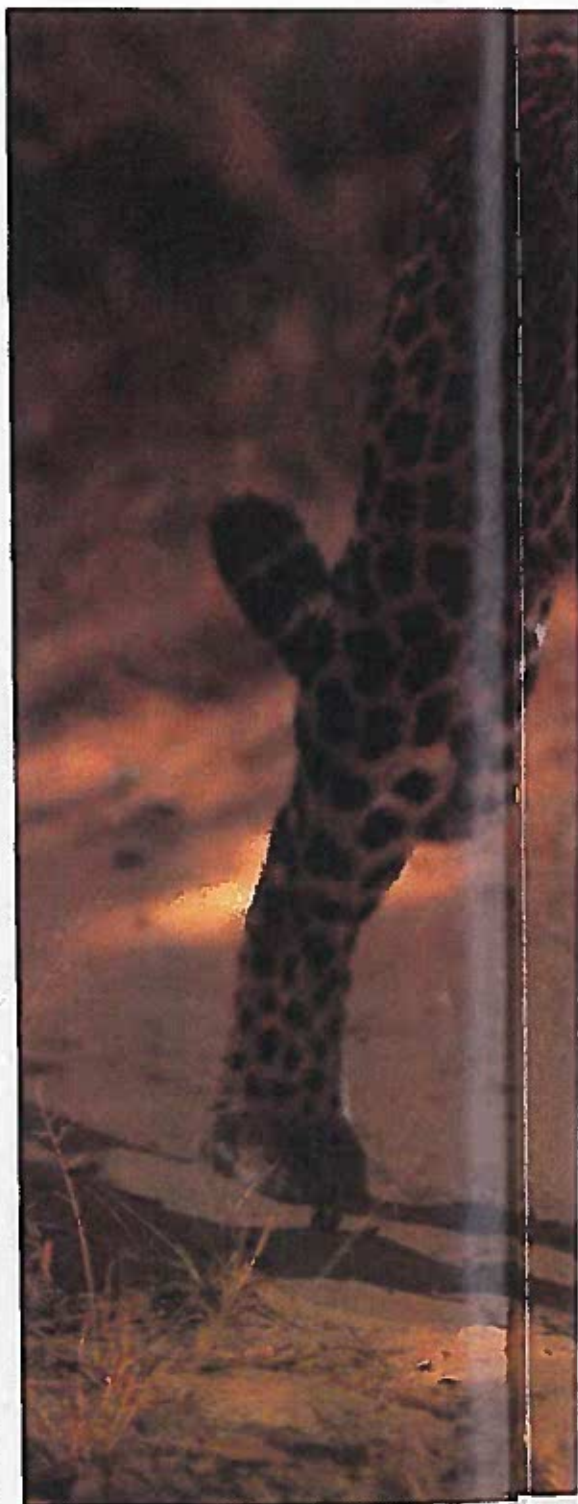
**F**FLASHY KIN of the domestic chicken, the Ceylon red jungle fowl (right) and its kind may mingle with barnyard flocks outside the parks. You see some very colorful chickens in the area.

Dazzled by a "living jewel," we patiently dogged the petite and elusive three-toed kingfisher (middle) along the aptly named Menik River—"river of gems."

If you want to find a fruit tree, listen for the Malabar pied hornbill (below), which sometimes nests in the trees that bear its food. The female enters a hole and molts. She and her mate seal the hollow with mud and dung, leaving a crack through which he feeds her. When the chicks hatch and her plumage returns, she breaks out, resealing the nest to guard the young, which emerge later.

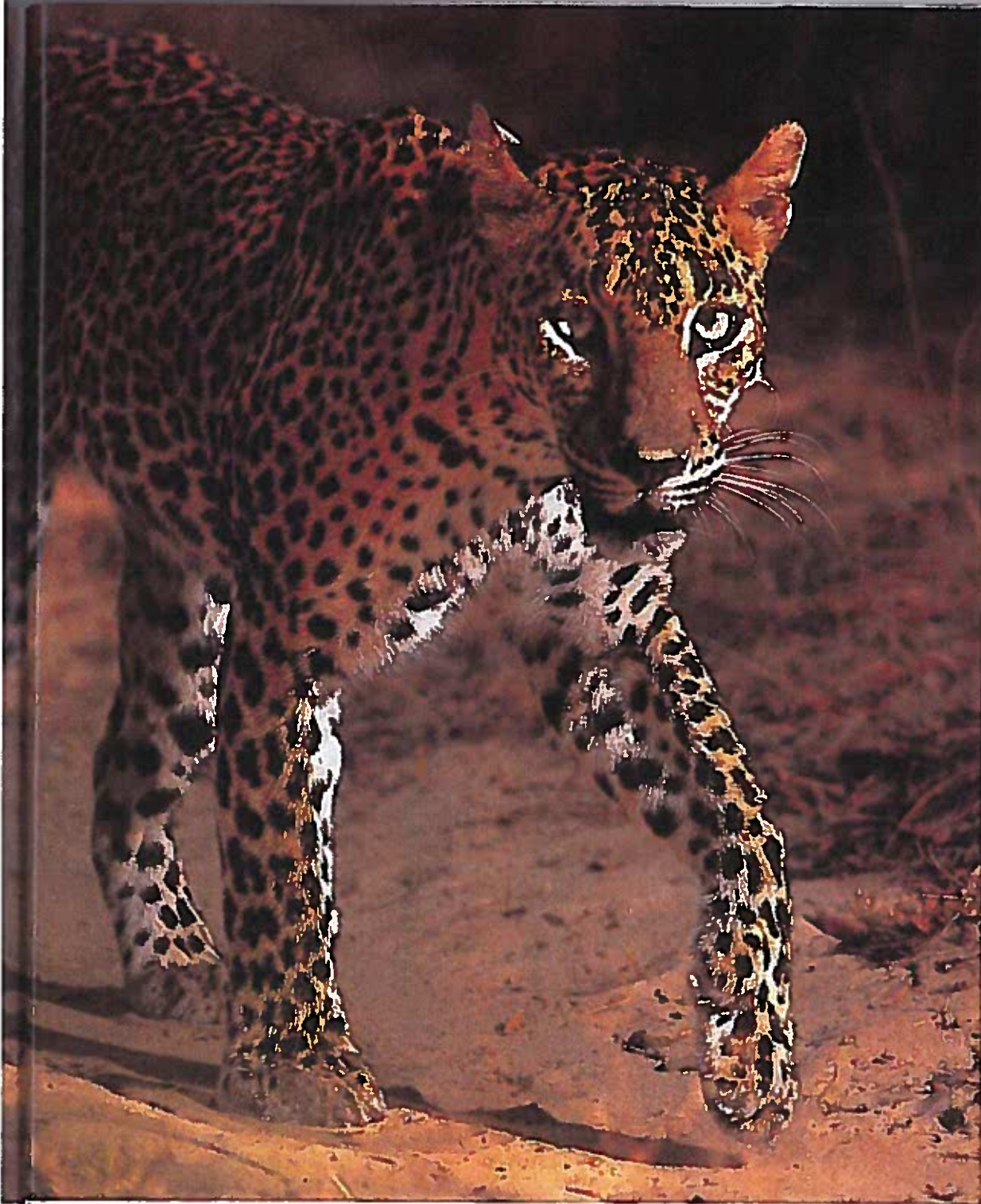
Seven days old and ravenous, paradise flycatchers (left) crane necks for an insect from mother. Within five days they will outgrow their nest, camouflaged by empty spider cocoons, and cling to the branch while their parents shuttle food.





**K**ILLER REBUFFED, for the moment. A leopard's attempt to raid a trio of wild boar piglets in Wilpattu meets ignominious failure at the tusks of

three adults (left). In film clips from the 45-second encounter, the boars bite the leopard's tail, then charge and butt their victim, who escapes with a desperate leap. But the



next week the leopard returned and caught the piglets one by one.

Perhaps 60 leopards live in Wilpattu, considered the world's best site for leopard-watching. Fines

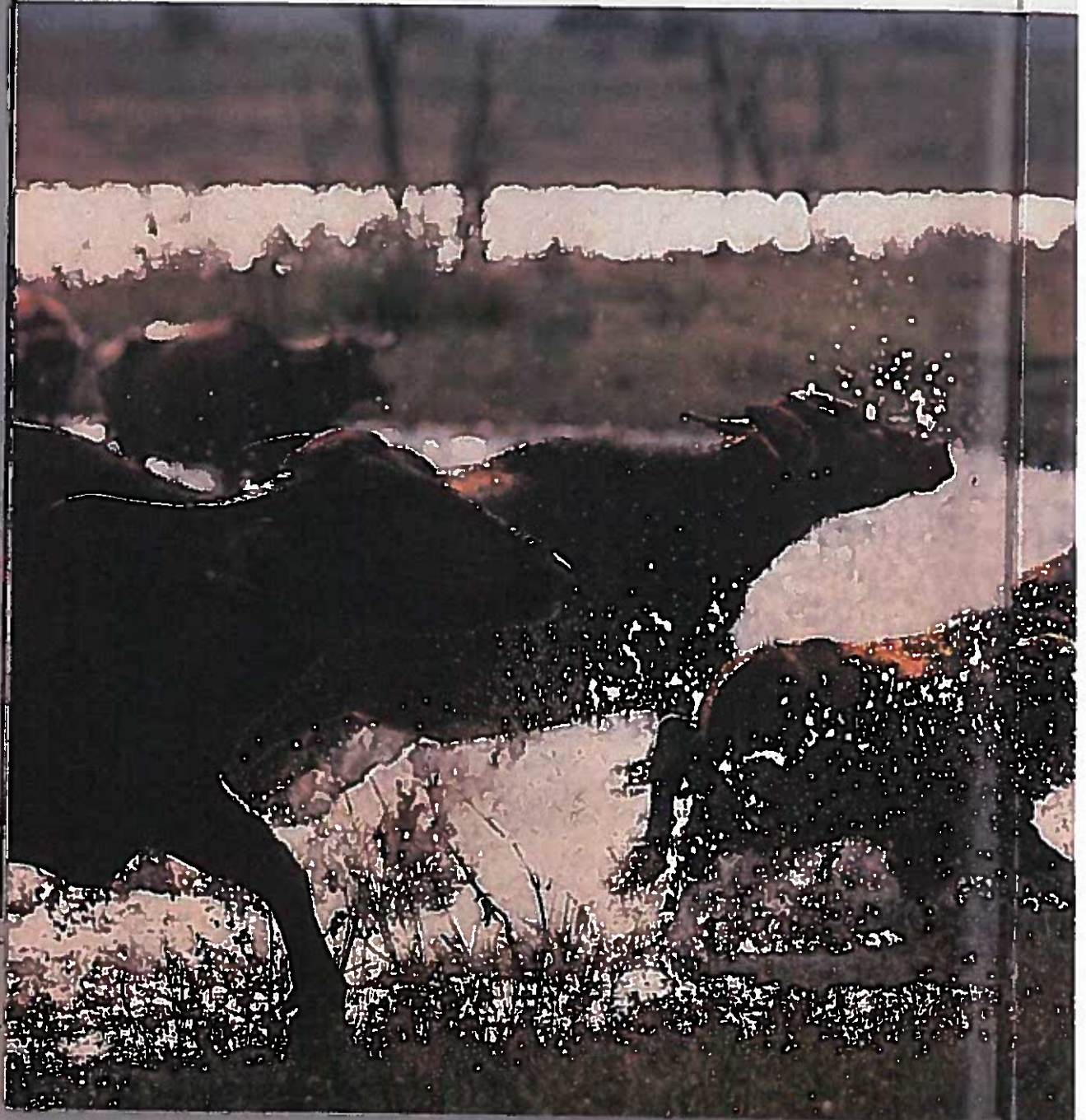
and jail sentences for poachers help protect the animals from their only enemy in Sri Lanka. This female (*above*) took her own portrait by tripping our hidden camera.



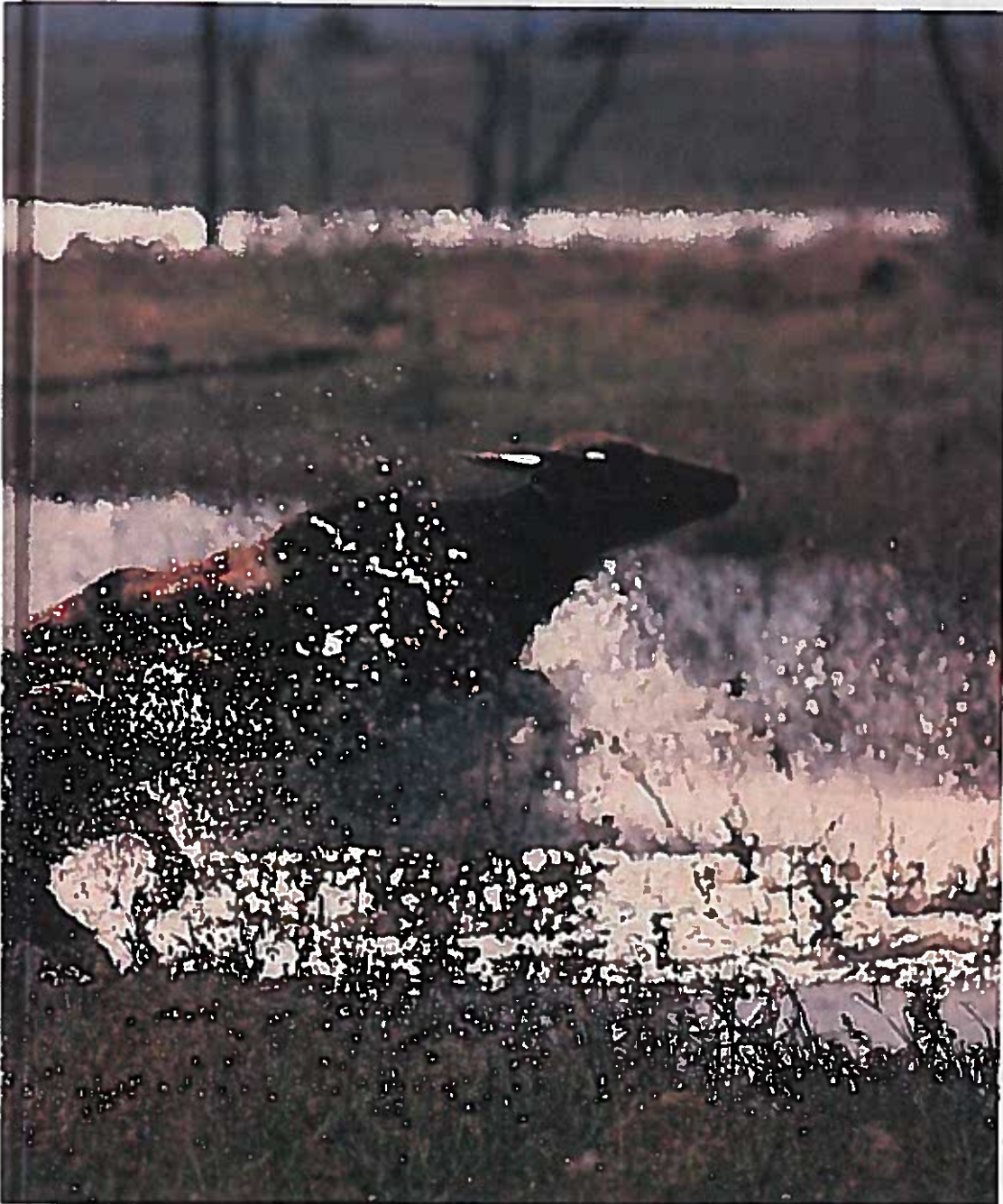
**I***N THE RACE* for survival the star tortoise bears the handicap of beauty. No animal in Sri Lanka is classified as endangered—thanks in part to the park system—but the star tortoise is one of the nation's rarest creatures, now seldom seen outside the parks. Where unprotected, it is preyed upon for sale in the international pet

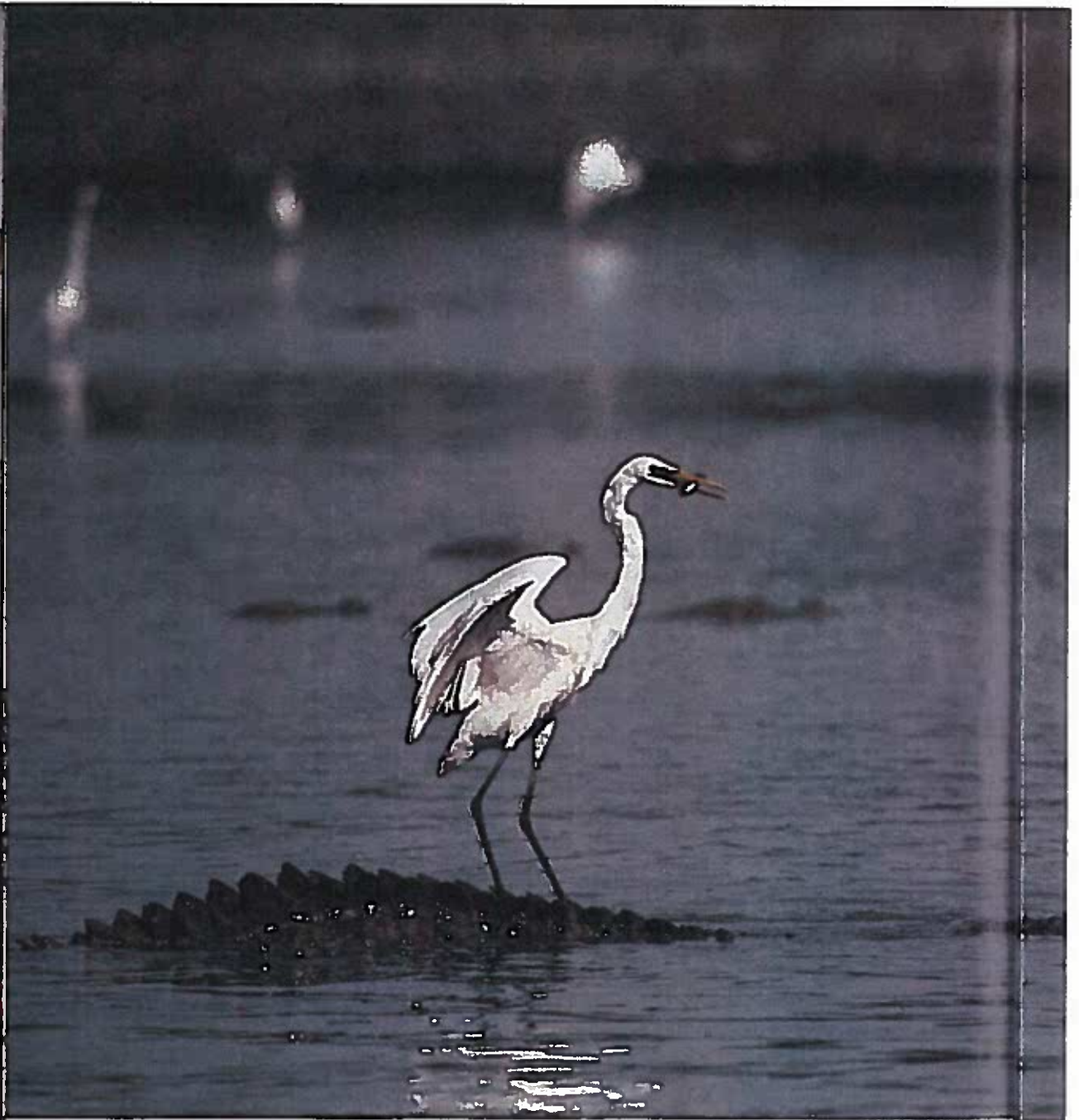
trade. This five-year-old, six-inch-long specimen strolling the beach in Yala will almost double in size as an adult.

Feral water buffalo in Gal Oya, stampeded by our car, descend from water buffalo imported from India centuries ago to cultivate rice fields. Leopards can strike down the young, but adults have no natural enemy in Sri

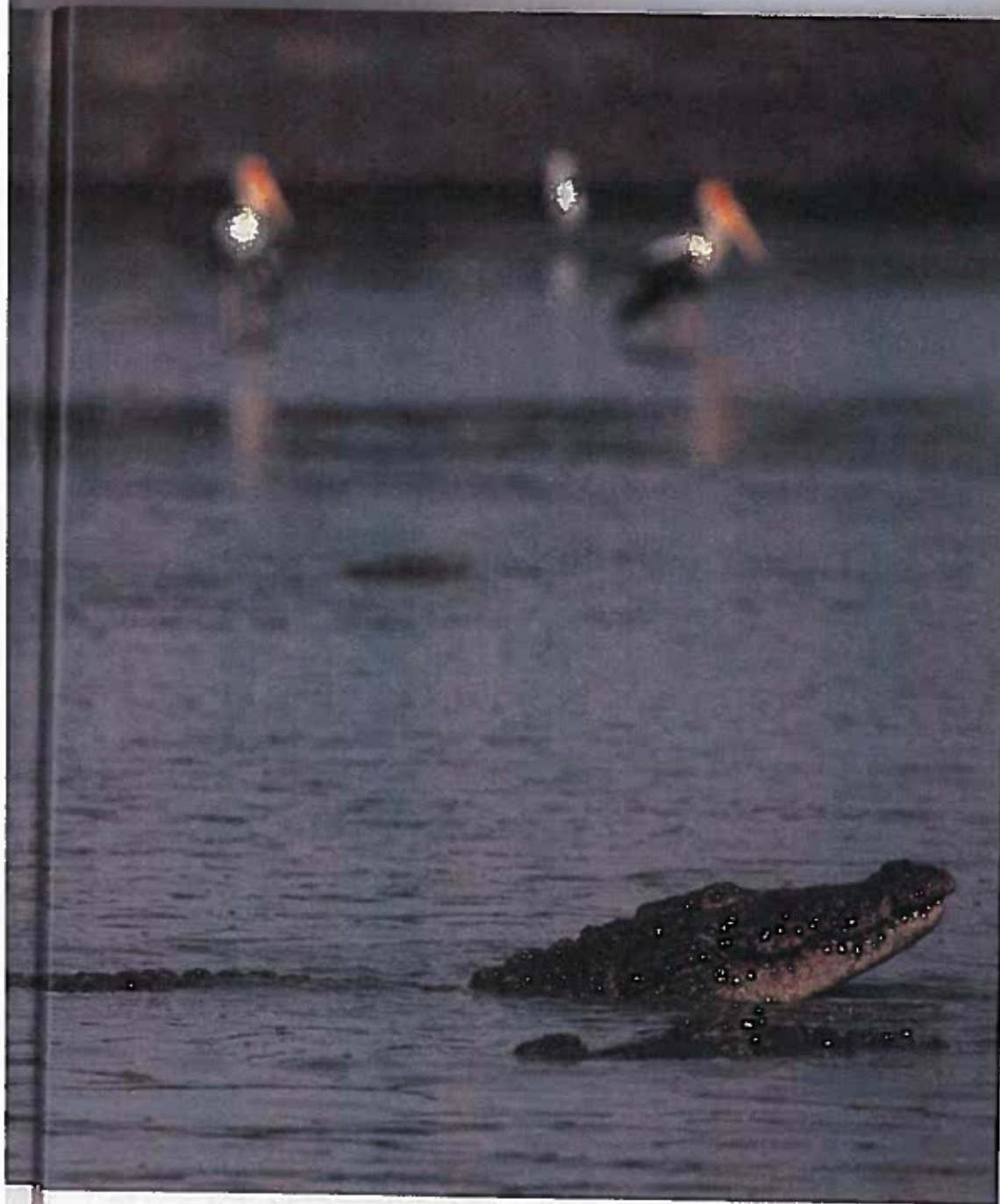


**Lanka. Overgrazing and competitive grazing with deer have become a problem. To solve it, park officials now cull about 100 young animals each year and transport them to state experimental farms where they are mated with domesticated water buffalo to strengthen the breed for agricultural work.**



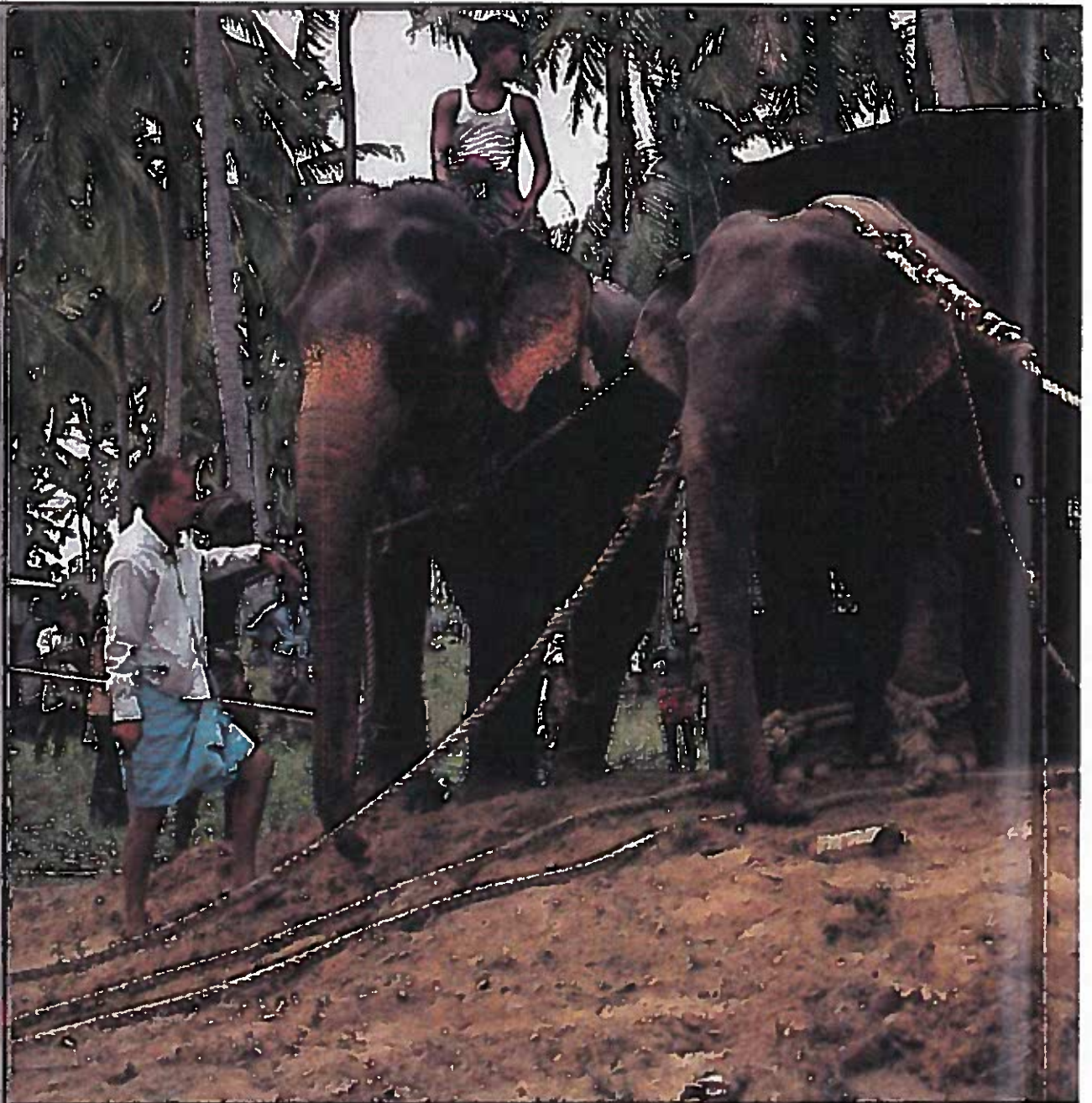


**R**IDING THE TAIL of a 12-foot crocodile, a great egret gambles that its perilous fishing perch will pay off with a bountiful feast. The trick, of course: to eat without being eaten. We observed this uneasy alliance



in a Yala water hole that had shrunk to about half normal size at the end of the dry season in the fall. By our count, 284 mugger crocodiles crowded the water hole to gorge on the concentrated schools of fish it contains.

As the crocodiles glide along, effortlessly feeding, fish leap wildly, and the opportunistic herons catch them in midair. But every so often, as if seeking more challenging prey, the crocs turn their jaws on their hitchhikers. \* \* \*



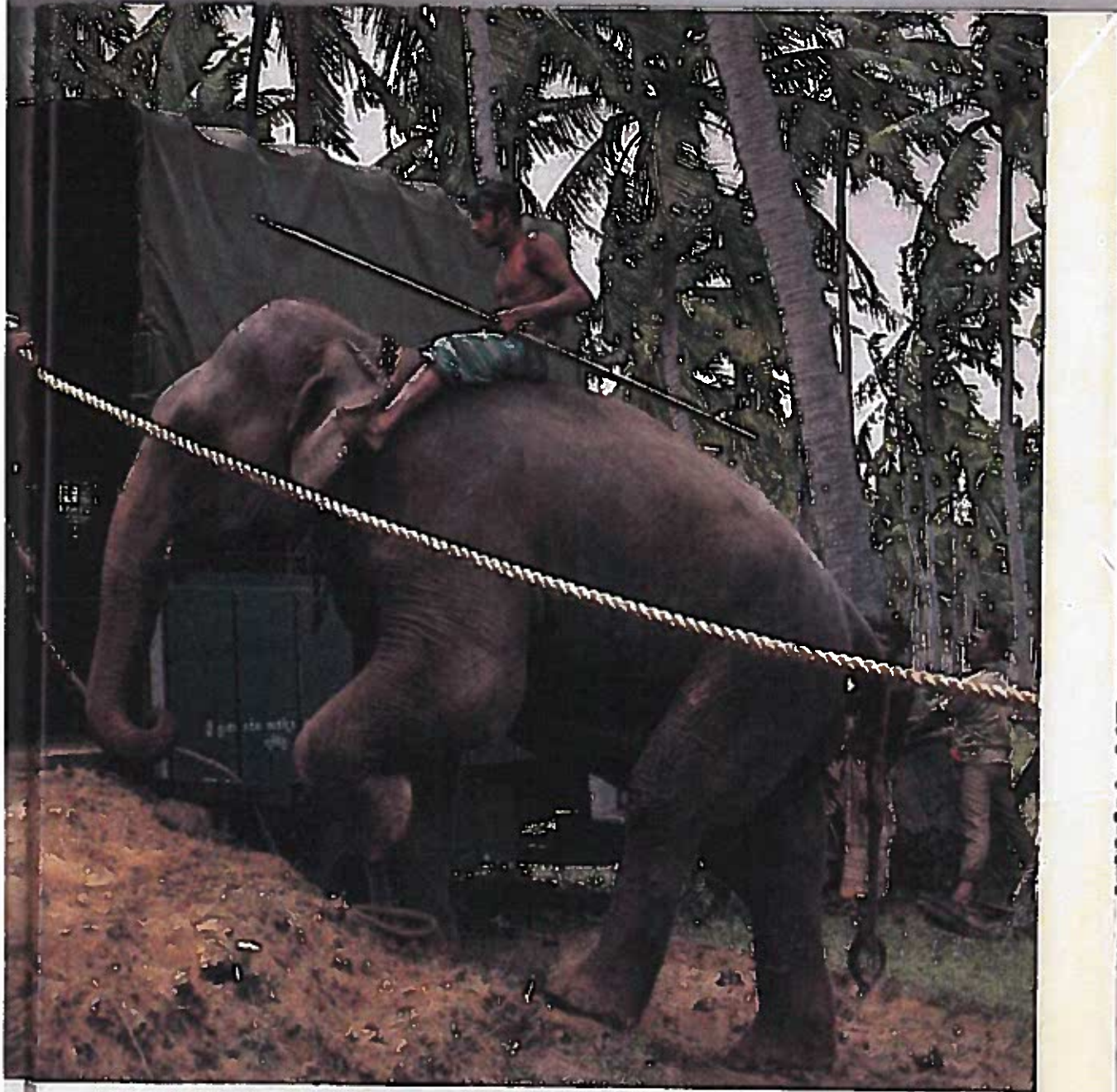
*Reluctant cargo, a tranquilized wild elephant balks as trained relatives maneuver it into a truck for relocation to Wilpattu National Park.*

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DIRECTOR, SRI LANKA DEPARTMENT  
OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

Photographs by  
**DIETER and MARY PLAGE**

**SRI LANKA'S WILDLIFE**

# A Nation Rises to the Challenge

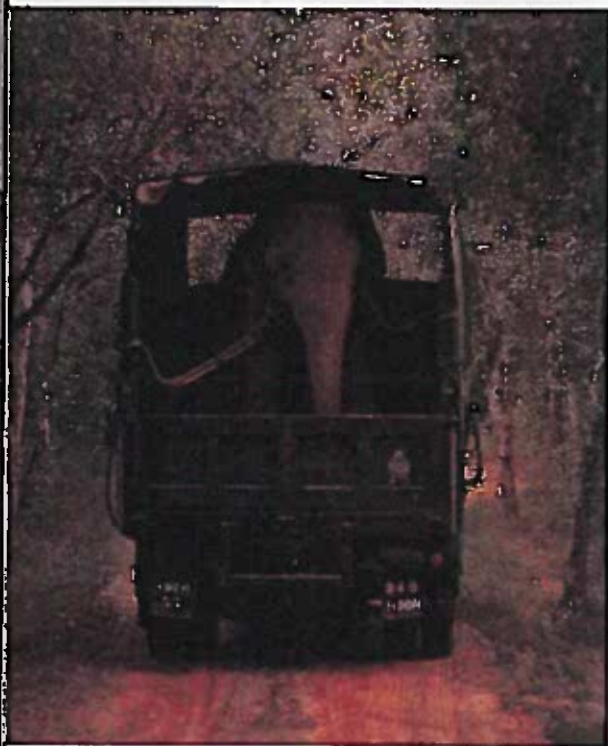


**W**ITH A CONFIDENCE born of experience, the big "monitor," an eight-foot-tall bull elephant specially trained to subdue and control his wild kin, sidled up to his unconscious cousin—felled by an anesthetic dart. The monitor stood patiently as his mahout attached him to the listless one with a fist-thick Manila rope, and other workers secured the captive's four legs by lines to nearby trees. After checking all connections, the team veterinarians injected the wild elephant with an antidote

laced with tranquilizer—a combination designed to let the animal awaken but still remain tractable.

The steadfast monitor, undismayed by the struggling and heaving of his charge, soon had the captive maneuvered, hind-quarters first, into a waiting truck. Hours later and 70 miles away, at Wilpattu National Park, the animal disembarked, its newcomer status proclaimed only by the number emblazoning its rump.

Thus another step toward protecting Sri



Four tons of elephant taxes the truck on the 70-mile trip to the park (top), where veterinarian Dr. Ian Hofmeyr (above) assists in its release. The rescue mission moved ten elephants from a populated area where they trampled crops, claimed human lives, and risked death themselves. Numbers scrawled in durable paint (facing page) allow park officials to monitor the transplants.

Lanka's scattered elephant population, perhaps 2,500 of them in all; I was proud to have been a part of it.

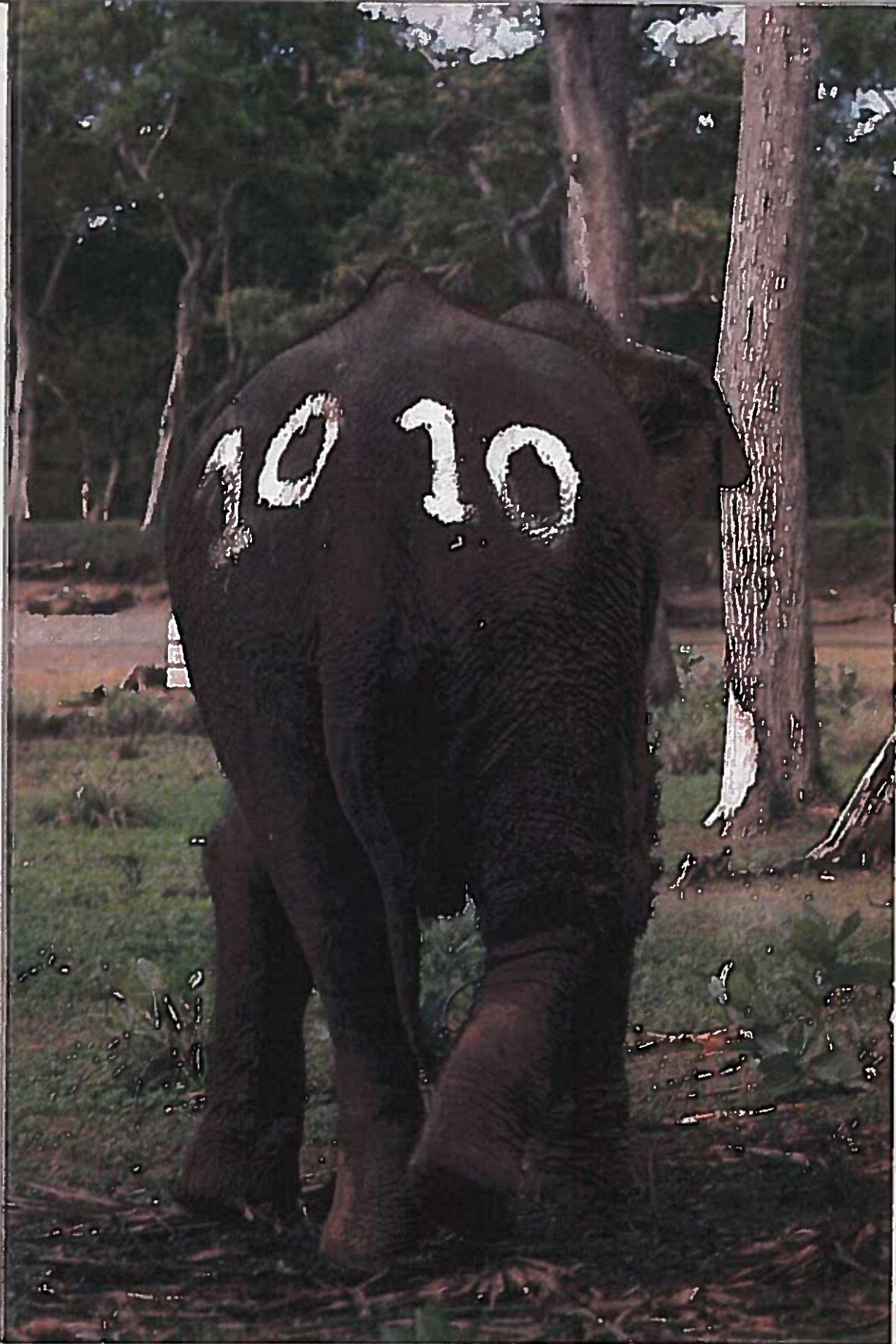
I am a man doubly blessed. Not only have I managed to translate my lifelong interest in conservation into my life's work, but I am also privileged to work for a nation (my native land) whose reverence for the sanctity of animal life predates Christ by three centuries. When a holy man from India then converted a Sri Lankan king to the life-respecting tenets of Buddhism, this land's first wildlife sanctuary was established.

Today in the island republic, which remains nearly 70 percent Buddhist, there are more than 50 refuges offering haven for 85 species of mammals and some 425 species of birds. But nowhere is the Sri Lankan's concern for fellow creatures more manifest than in his awe and affection for our largest and most exciting mammal, the elephant.

*Elephas maximus seylanicus*, a subspecies of the endangered Asian elephant, stands a better chance of survival than the mainland population. A part of the country's culture, it figures in sport, work, village festivities—and it is the only animal deemed worthy of carrying the casket containing sacred relics of Lord Buddha.

**O**NLY in modern times have our beloved elephants been seriously threatened by the encroachments of a burgeoning human population. Animals that once roamed free slowly became trapped in isolated forest enclaves completely surrounded by land cleared for agriculture (page 278). Their plight became even more desperate with the advent in the late 1970s of a development scheme to dam the Mahaweli River and divert its waters to irrigate some 900,000 dry-zone acres. Rivaling Egypt's Aswan High Dam in scope, the two-billion-dollar project will employ perhaps 30,000 citizens and eventually double the nation's electric power supply, while also providing for the resettlement of at least 100,000 largely landless families.

For Sri Lanka's 15 million people, this was good news. For the elephants in the development area it meant something entirely different. With their forest enclaves scheduled to be either logged to open more land or flooded as a result of new reservoirs, the







*Only remnants of forest remain outside the parks to shelter elephants, their once vast habitat razed for needed agricultural and industrial growth. Most of Sri Lanka's 2,500 wild elephants roam protected in the parks. The successful relocations to Wilpattu promise hope for those still at large.*

elephants faced either death or relocation.

Of course we opted then, as we have ever since, for relocation. We use the method described above for hopelessly isolated small herds. But when scores of elephants have to be relocated, we drive them, like cattle.

Indeed in 1979 we decided, to avoid breaking up a herd, to mount a drive of 150 elephants—composed of numerous small groups scattered in widely separated cul-de-sac over a ten-mile radius—some 30 miles to Wilpattu National Park. Night after night our enthusiastic rangers and other trained employees—with thunderous firecrackers, brilliant flares, bonfires, and their own raucous hooting, howling, and caterwauling—persuaded recalcitrant elephants to abandon their familiar haunts for places unknown, and not to sneak back!

Technically it was a success. The animals reached their destination without harm to themselves or their human herders. But because of its complexities, the relocation of those animals took a full 12 months. Since then we've become quicker and better.

**N**OMATTER WHAT the means used to relocate these animals, questions arise. Can Wilpattu, for all its 505 square miles of dense forest, provide food

and water for 300 elephants where before there had been perhaps 50? And what of raids by the behemoths on the crops of bordering villages?

The government is facing those problems by providing new lakes, transplanted forage, and buffer zones between croplands and park. These are steps—important steps—but our work is far from finished.

By 1986 another 100,000 hectares (about 400 square miles) will be transformed from forest to field, and my department is charged with finding new homes for the displaced creatures—among them some 600 more elephants. One plan is to open a new park at Maduru Oya, which will connect by “jungle corridors” or “link forests” to other wildlife preserves.

Our plans, admittedly, are ambitious, and much of the emphasis is on elephants. But the plight of this most majestic animal symbolizes the magnitude and complexity of the entire wildlife problem. I believe that if Sri Lanka provides sufficient room for its wild elephants, it will have ample sustainable ecosystems for all its flora and fauna.

Too ambitious? Maybe. But such ambition has contributed to the fact that no Sri Lanka animal population is endangered.

May it always be so. □