



A Wildly Generous Life



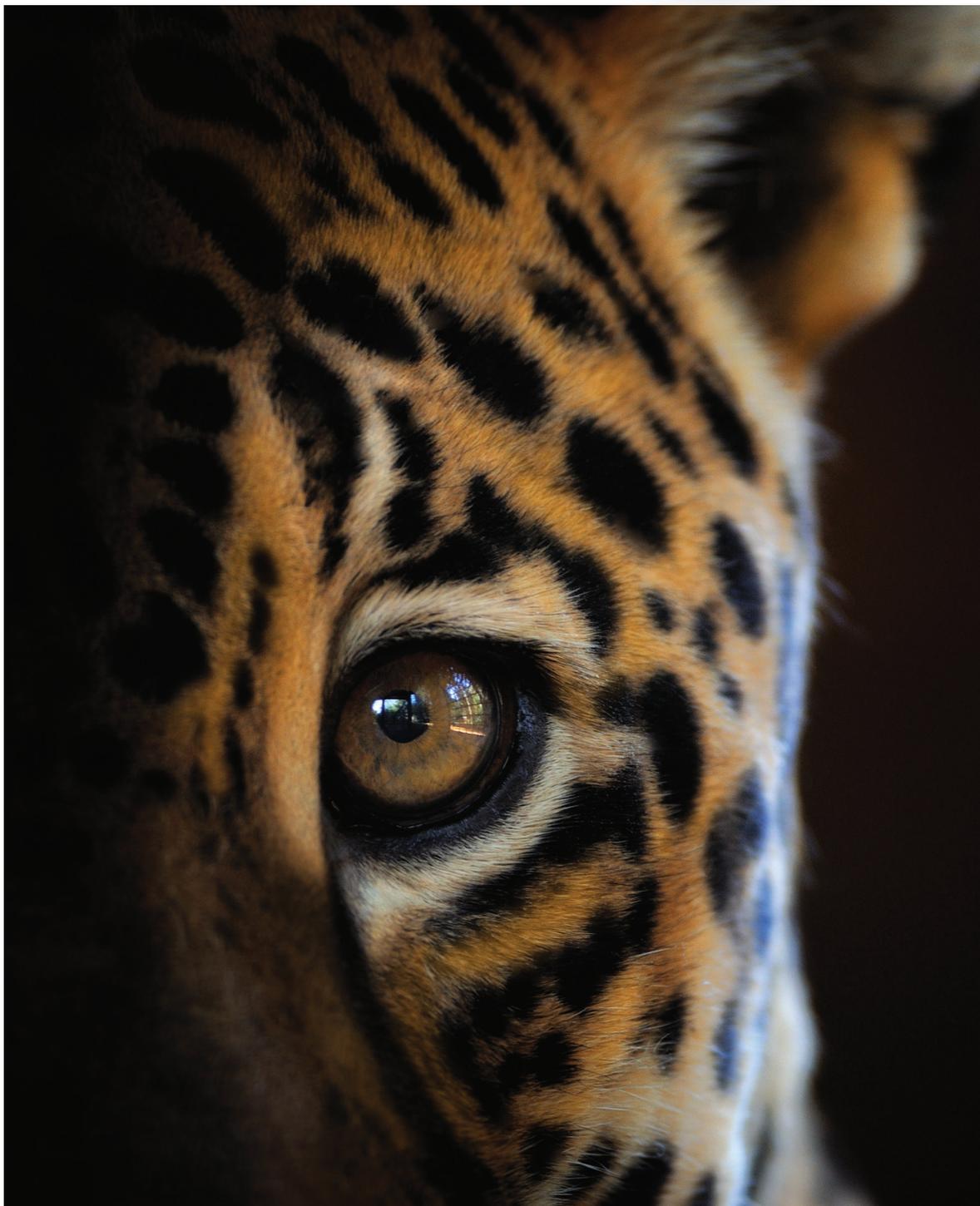
An interview with the wildly gifted Laura Crawford Williams, in which we discuss her eight year labor of love and what may be in store for the next eight years.

“I think people forget,” says Laura Crawford Williams, wildlife photographer, conservationist and author. “They like to think they are separate from wild things. They forget that in the times when we are the saddest, or the most unhappy or struggling, a lot of times nature is where we end up when we want to calm down, slow down.”

When we sat down with Laura to discuss her first book, *Wildlife in Wild Lands: Photography for Conservation in Southern South America*—part wildlife photography, part scientific catalogue, part journal—she explained that the work is a tribute to those who generously labor in the name of conservation.

She dedicates the book to Doug and Kris Tomkins, American conservationists who acquired and generously donated mass amounts of land back to the government in South America. Their generosity lit a fire under her own conservation efforts. For Laura, the Tomkins “represent the epitome of everything I dare to hope this book may begin to inspire in others.”

Her first book is nothing short of inspirational. Printed on Sappi McCoy Silk paper with soft touch aqueous coating, the pages feel silky and soft. You notice it almost before you notice the gorgeous full-page spreads. Animal species like the Gilded Sapphire or the Rosy-Billed Pochard seem to leap from the page into your soul. *Wildlife in Wild Lands* is just as the introduction claims, an eight year labor of love.



Thumbing through her 244-page book, it's hard to believe that Laura did not set out to be a wildlife photographer. "My education was always in science—medicine, natural history," she says. "Photography kind of happened as an accident. Almost immediately I was published in *National Wildlife* and larger national magazines. At that point, the universe was kind of yelling at me," she confesses.

When her work appeared in *National Geographic*, she decided to take the next step. And that next step was not necessarily to dedicate her life to wildlife photography, but rather to dedicate her photography to the conservation efforts in South America. In those eight years, her photography work led her to meet "scientists, researchers, conservation minded individuals and organizations. All doing work to preserve wild lands and wildlife species." And she found ways to contribute, to be a factor.

It started with someone asking, "Maybe you can come out and do some photography, because we want to turn this huge group of *estancias* [cattle ranches] into a private reserve." And Laura would go. Another person might ask, "Maybe you can come and work with this scientist, he's trying to save Blue-Throated Macaws in a very small area of Bolivia." And Laura would go.

Those eight years took her literally all across Southern South America.

From her first trip to Argentina, speaking almost no Spanish, and with two sold out runs of her book, it's been a wild eight year journey. When she looks back, she feels fulfilled. She's not closing any doors, but she feels strongly that she's done all that she can do in South America.

While that chapter of her life might be coming to a close, she's certainly not placing any limitations on the next chapter. "I have another book in the works which is more about the back story behind the photos, adventures in the field and the crazy animal encounters. People love to see us in the field and working with animals or with other scientists. Or in terrible conditions, in snow, getting stuck, the flat tires."

Laura has been the singular force behind the book's publication. Every photograph is hers. Every caption and every story was penned by her own hand. She oversaw the translations, the first print run. She signs every book. To finance the production and printing costs, Laura set up her first Kickstarter campaign, a task she admittedly did not enjoy.

Laura came to Southeastern on a recommendation. She was losing steam for the project. She says the team at Southeastern loved the project so much that it helped re-invigorate her. "Everyone was so great and so helpful and so excited about the project. They kept me excited for it, even when I was kind of losing energy for it."

Laura photographed this jaguar in captivity, very close and almost inside the cage. During that time, he was calm and allowed her to spend a great deal of time with him. A former Jaguar hunter had illegally captured this jaguar to save him from being killed by local gauchos.



Above: Laura Crawford Williams. Right: Southeastern's Anneliese Gelber and Laura review the first editions in the company's client lounge, where she also hand-signed many editions.



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"Southeastern set me up in the client lobby," she says, "I would work on my other stuff all day long. And they would call me for the print run when the team was ready for me to proof something. I was there for the first run of each page of the book."

During her time at Southeastern, Laura experimented in the wide format division, testing prints of her photographs on the company's new, hybrid UV inkjet printer. Additionally, Southeastern assisted her with prints for a December exhibit.

Wildlife and Wild Lands is now available for purchase. It was and is a labor of love. It is Laura's generous gift to us, her contribution to the cause for conservation. What we do with it she does not dare to know, but she has incredibly high hopes.

Above: A black-browed albatross sits on its nest. The species was classified as endangered for almost a decade, until 2013 when it was reclassified as threatened. Unfortunately, deaths related to human activities still occur as a result of longline and trawl fishing, especially in the South Atlantic. This picture was taken in the Falkland Islands.