

Wildlife photographers becoming conservationists

By Juliet Eilperin, Washington Post

Steve Winter has followed snow leopards through the Himalayas, been trapped in quicksand in the world's largest tiger reserve, in Burma, and been stalked by jaguars in Brazil. As a *National Geographic* photographer, that's all just part of his job.

But he also serves as media director for Panthera, a nonprofit group that works on behalf of big cats in the wild. He will soon have dinner with the Honduran president and some of the group's scientists to discuss creating a wildlife corridor for jaguars between the United States and Central America.

"The world needs no more pictures of pretty animals," Winter said. "What the world needs is the story behind these animals and their struggle of being around humans."

Michael "Nick" Nichols, a *National Geographic* editor at large, has been worrying about the decline of the world's lion population for more than a decade and spent years devising equipment to chronicle the animals on the Serengeti. Because they're active at night, Nichols is using infrared lights and sensors. He's employing a miniature German-built helicopter to capture how lions live. "The technology is in place to look at lions in a new way," he said.

Nichols and Winter belong to a new breed of environmental photographers who not only record wild animals and the stunning worlds they inhabit, but also push to preserve them.

Prominent wildlife photographers, including Ansel Adams, have spoken out for conservation in the past. But today's photographers have taken the mission to new heights by

changing how they craft their images and by lobbying policymakers in Washington and abroad.

Winter, who speaks about the threats to big cats in *National Geographic* lectures, has met with government officials in Burma, Costa Rica, Cuba and India to discuss species he has photographed. Brian Skerry, an underwater photographer with *National Geographic*, sent his new book, "Ocean Soul," to every member of the Senate Ocean Caucus along with a personal note thanking them for their conservation efforts.

Nature photographer Amy Gulick published a book, "Salmon in the Trees," that documents the links among wild salmon, grizzly bears and old-growth trees in Alaska's Tongass National Forest. A copy of it sits on the desk of Harris Sherman, the Agriculture Department's undersecretary for natural resources and environment. He says it "connects the critical dots between healthy forests and rivers with sustainable salmon fisheries," and describes it as "a must-read" for understanding ecosystems such as the Tongass.

Once they've captured the images, many of these photographers hit the road to advocate for conservation. Alan Rabinowitz and Howard Quigley, scientists who are spearheading the effort to create a wildlife corridor for jaguars, invited Winter to dine with Honduran President Porfirio Lobo so he can show him some of the images of jaguars he has taken in the field. A group from the International League of Conservation Photographers joined with the Sierra Club in 2009 to campaign successfully against mountaintop removal mining in British Columbia's Flathead River Valley.

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