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APRIL 2013 £3.99

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WILD THINGS

YUSUF AHMAD ANSARI INDIA

This man can magically open your eyes and ears to the wildlife of one of India's foremost tiger reserves: Ranthambore National Park in Rajasthan. He will point out tiny, rare owls camouflaged in tree trunks, teach you to recognise the distant call of a langur and marvel with you at the sheer beauty of the park. And if there's a tiger lurking in the vicinity, he will track it (always extremely sensitively). A graduate of Stowe school and the LSE, he sounds more English than Hugh Grant, yet is very down-to-earth. Ansari is a historian, a former politician (in 2007, he contested what he calls 'a highly successful election campaign which was followed by a highly unsuccessful election result' in Uttar Pradesh) and the author of several books. He's currently working on a biography of the Mughal Emperor Akbar. But most of all, he's a conservationist. His acute instincts have been honed by years spent among wildlife, from family holidays in the Himalayas; trips to the Terai in Nepal, where aged seven he was charged by an elephant; and a childhood home in countryside teeming with antelope. Ansari is the director of wildlife experiences at stylish Sher Bagh tented camp in Ranthambore (book through India authority Greaves Travel), and is in his element when guiding the lucky guests.

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www.greavesindia.co.uk

RICHARD KNOCKER TANZANIA

Knocker has lived most of his life in Kenya and is one of those old Africa hands who seems to have been born with khaki shorts on, a rifle in one hand (merely for protection) and binoculars in the other. He was one of a cool, young group who founded Nomad Tanzania with just two Land Rovers and a trailer; the company now owns and runs small safari camps in remote and wild areas of Tanzania (including the north-eastern Serengeti as well as the shores of Lake Tanganyika). The great appeal of having Knocker as your guide is that you can go on walking safaris. There's nothing like being on foot for bringing you up-close to the natural world and for encouraging you to respect and understand its unrelenting rules. He's not only interested in the Big Five but also the Little Five, which includes the buffalo weaver, elephant shrew and ant lion. With Knocker, it's about learning why wild places matter and the role that every living thing has to play. Like all the best safari guides he has a treasure trove of epic stories to tell, of miraculous escapes from danger and death. In his company, Africa is a richer, more meaningful place.

info@nomad-tanzania.com;
www.nomad-tanzania.com

JUAN TEJADA PERU

Tejada claims you only need four things to survive in the jungle: 'a machete, a mosquito net, a pack of matches and some salt'. But really there's only one thing you need: him. Born and raised in the rainforest, Tejada can imitate the call of a harpy eagle (a predator of sloths) to make them move into your view, and can spot caimans when they're camouflaged by leaves or submerged in black-water creeks. He'll catch them, too, so that you can have a closer look at those leathery scales and razor-sharp teeth. Tejada can show you how to fish for piranha with a stick and line; he'll point out tiny, saddle-backed tamarin monkeys high up in the jungle canopy and he'll prevent you standing on a deadly poisonous fer-de-lance snake, curled up right on your path at dusk. Tejada has the eyes and ears you need to see the highlights of the magnificent, muddy Amazon and survive unscathed. He works with Aqua Expeditions, a top-notch river-cruise company which can reach those wild and wonderful places that few people are able to get to, so climb aboard as soon as you get the chance.

+51 1 434 5544;
www.aquaexpeditions.com ➤

Spot caimans when they are camouflaged and catch them, too, so you can have a look at those leathery scales and razor-sharp teeth