

Photographer on journey to save king of swingers

Prize winner Xi Zhinong raises public awareness about endangered snub-nosed monkeys

By YU NAN
China Daily staff

On a snowy day in March 2001, wildlife photographer Xi Zhinong woke up early in the morning and stepped outside to trace a group of some 200 Yunnan snub-nosed monkeys living in the Yunnan Mountains in Southwest China's Yunnan Province.

The day was crystal clear when the snow finally stopped.

Xi found a good angle and set up his tripod. Luckily, he was blocked by a few branches so the monkeys could not detect him.

Light was fading, and the adult monkeys were busy filling themselves with as many new buds of the oak trees as possible before sunset, while the young ones played among the branches.

At that moment, the light streamed on two young snub-nosed monkeys, and Xi gently pressed the shutter.

The clicks attracted some of the monkeys' attention. They turned towards Xi but found nothing unusual and so they continued to enjoy their dinner and to play.

Xi continued photographing the vivid images until darkness fell, and the monkeys disappeared.

"It was one of the luckiest moments," Xi said, talking about his nine-year pursuit of the Yunnan snub-nosed monkeys. He never expected that shots would bring him an international award — the Gerald Durrell Award — in the 2001 BG Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition, considered the most prestigious wildlife photography competition in the world.

The Gerald Durrell Award is named after a late photographer's long-time work with endangered species. Xi is

the first Chinese photographer to win the award, which was presented to him on October 25 at a ceremony in London.

The Yunnan snub-nosed monkey (*Rhinopithecus bieti*) is among the most endangered mammal species in the world. A mere 1,000 to 1,500 are believed to exist in forests in areas between Yunnan Province and the Tibet Autonomous Region.

They live at the highest elevation of all primates — between 3,000 to 4,700 metres above sea level.

In part, due to their rugged habitat, little scientific research on the monkey has been conducted, and not a single picture of the monkeys in the wild was taken before 1992.

Xi was the first photographer to capture the monkeys on film in the wild.

"I'd first heard about the monkey when I was making a documentary and met Professor Long Yongcheng," Xi recalled. "The former professor from the Chinese Academy of Sciences told me he was studying the monkey, and the monkey was very rare and almost unique to Yunnan."

"Although Yunnan's Asian elephants and green peafowl are widely known and the province is hailed as the kingdom of wildlife, hardly anyone knew about the monkey," said Xi, who grew up in Kunming, the provincial capital. "But the monkey is the king of the kingdom! I vowed to document its life so that people can know more about the endangered king."

Long Yongcheng and American zoologist Craig Kirkpatrick began working together on a two-year survey about the monkeys in the mountains separating the upper Yangtze and

Mekong rivers in 1992. Xi volunteered to join them with his own video camera.

Though the study on the monkey's behaviour was conducted in a nature reserve, the researchers found that the monkeys already were wary and fearful of humans. This wariness, coupled with steep terrain and dense cover, thwarted Xi's plans to film them.

Over the next two years, Xi made six visits to the reserve, each lasting between 20 days and two months. The journey to reach the monkeys required four or five days of travel from Kunming. Yet he saw the monkeys only twice.

"When the monkeys see the shadow of creatures that walk upright with two legs, they run away immediately," Xi said. "The monkeys look at human beings as their enemy because their home was ruined and they were killed by them."

Illegal poaching and excessive logging has devastated their habitat and pushed this species near extinction.

When college students in Beijing saw the photos taken by Xi, they were shocked and lighted 200 candles together to pray for the monkey's survival.

"The vivid pictures and film are the most efficient way to stir people's attention towards wild animals which can be and should be our harmonious friends," said Xi.

"It is a pity that there are still very few pictures and film about the wildlife in China," Xi lamented.

Without pictures and films, the public awareness of the plight of endangered wildlife has been relatively slight.

However, this has begun to change in the past few years. In 1996 Xi Zhinong ignited a national campaign to curb the logging of forests in Yunnan's Deqin County — home to over 200 highly endangered Yunnan snub-nosed monkeys — which was later recognized as a milestone in the development of China's grassroots wildlife conservation movement.

Since 1997 Xi has focused his camera on the Tibetan antelope, a species endemic to the Qinghai-Tibet plateau which has been massacred for its wool by armed poachers since the early 1990s.

Last year, Xi founded a conservation organization, Green Plateau Institute, to promote sustainable development in the wild habitat of the snub-nosed monkey.

Regarded as "the dedicated conservationist" by many people, Xi has devoted himself to raising the Chinese public's awareness on conservation issues and preserving China's remaining wildlife.

"It doesn't matter whether I win prizes or not," Xi said. "This is a good chance to let more and more Chinese know how important wildlife is to us, and to know that many people care about this issue."

"I do hope that children who grow up in cities can see our pictures so they know that nature is colourful, and animals are our friends."



Photos by XI ZHINONG
This photograph by Xi Zhinong was given the "Gerald Durrell Award" in the 2001 BG Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition.



Illegal poaching: The heads of antelopes killed by poachers. Illegal poaching is a serious problem that endangers rare, wild animals.



Lamb



Eagle



Wild yak



Wild mule

'Green' expo opens in Xiamen

CHEN LIANG
China Daily staff

XIAMEN: Pavilions, traditional residential buildings, fountains, a man-made banyan tree and flowers caught visitors' attention at the First Xiamen International Conference & Exhibition Centre which opened on Thursday in the coastal city of East China's Fujian Province.

More than 40 cities from around the country are showcasing their achievements in urban landscaping, afforestation and environmental protection at the fair.

"The exposition aims to establish a platform for communication and interaction between government, the public and enterprises so as to promote implementation of the sustainable development strategy in urban planning, construction and administration," said Qu Geping, chairman of the Environment Protection and Resources Con-

servation Committee of the National People's Congress.

"It advocates green civilization and expects to explore a 'green passage' for cities' sustainable development."

During the ceremony, Zhu Yayan, deputy governor of Fujian Province and Mayor of Xiamen, revealed that the exhibition covered an area of more than 25,000 square metres.

The area is divided into sections that display Chinese achievements in urban landscaping, afforestation and environmental protection; international high and new technologies; landscaping, afforestation and environmental protection machinery and equipment; and green products.

Representatives from New Zealand, Australia, Japan and Lithuania were among more than 20,000 participants from home and abroad.

Mayors from more than 100 Chinese cities signed a "Chinese

Mayors' Green Announcement" at the opening ceremony and vowed to create "green cities, green economy, green lifestyles and green civilization," — the theme of the exposition — in their cities.

The 21st Century Green Cities Forums, including the High-Level Forum on City Environment and Development, the Green Residence Forum and the Green Industry Forum, are also being held during the exposition.

A total of 205 investment programmes concerning afforestation, environmental protection and urban landscaping will be promoted at the exposition.

Sponsored by the Environment Protection and Resources Conservation Committee of the National People's Congress, the Ministry of Construction, the National Environmental Protection Bureau and the Xiamen municipal government, the exposition is the first of its kind held in the country and will run through to November 11.

Nanning comes alive with song

By HEN JIE
Daily staff

Southern China's Guangxi Autonomous Region will be filled with song as the Third International Folk Songs Festival kicks off. Guangxi groups including the Zhuang, Yao, Miao, and Jing. All share a common love: singing. According to an old saying, no

place in Guangxi is left untouched by song. A popular form of communication, folk songs play a key role in local life.

Almost every ethnic group in Guangxi holds an annual folk songs festival. Today's event, which will feature folk songs and dances against a backdrop of blossoming flowers and green grass, is a blend of all the traditional festivals.

This year's festival kicks off with tonight's grand opening ceremony which will bring together a number of famous folk singers

from both home and abroad. Some pop singers and bands will also perform revised folk songs.

Other activities include a folk song singing fair, the Guangxi Regional Folk Songs Competition and the Chinese Folk Songs Competition, which will be attended by folk singers from the country's 56 ethnic groups.

During the festival, which runs until Tuesday, various stages open to folk art ensembles and locals will be set up in various parks and squares in Nanning.

Several other competitions and shows will also be held during the run of the festival. The 11th National Vocal Competition of the Ethnic Groups draws 80 singers from 56 ethnic groups to compete for the "Peacock Prize."

More than 30 plays from across the country will compete in the Seventh Chinese Local Operas Festival for the "Plum Blossom Award."

The opera festival will end with an evening fashion show featuring local opera costumes on November 25.