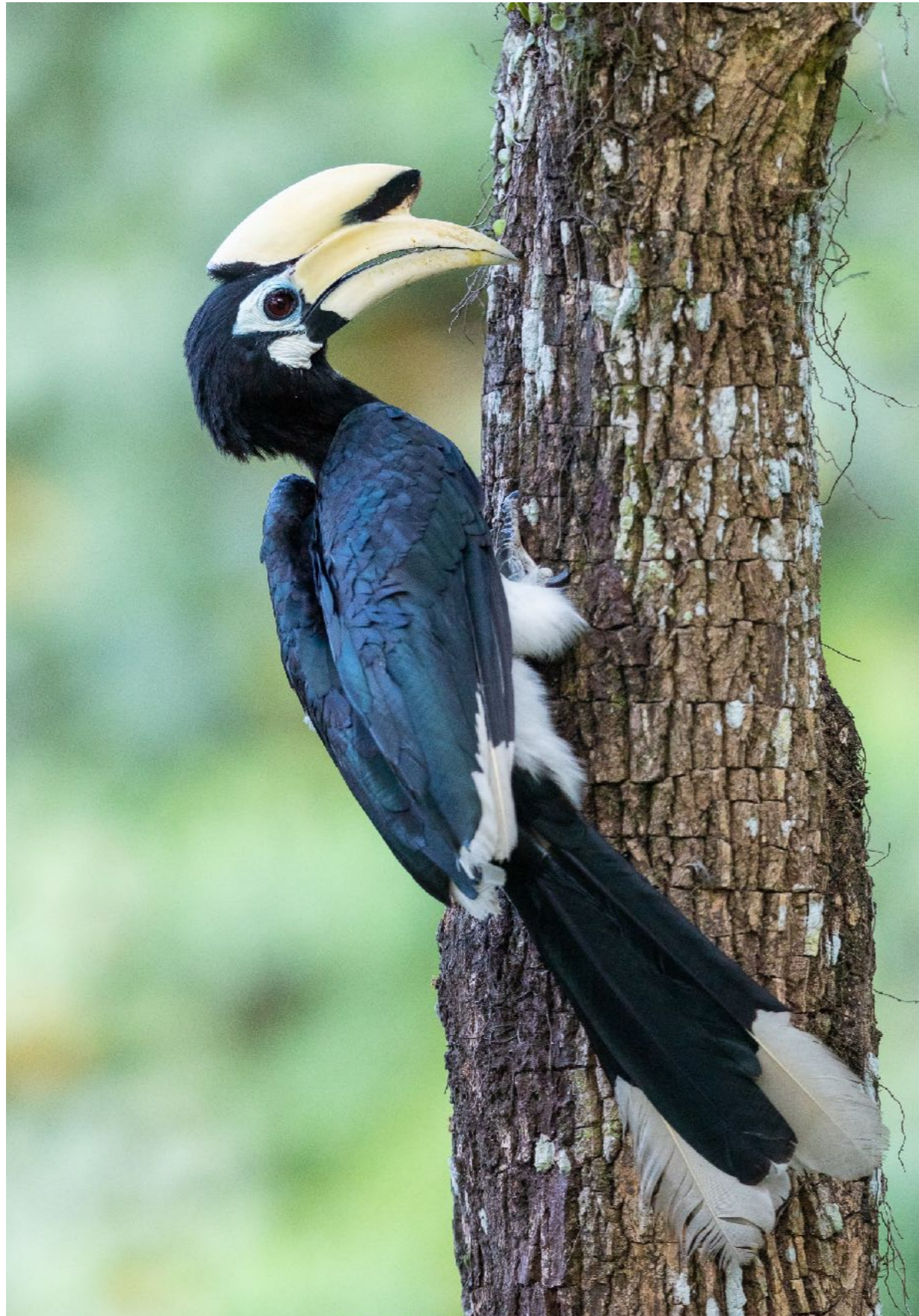




Lens & Pens

The Circle of Life



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The new film directed by Tim Plowden provides fresh insights into bird nest predation by Oriental Pied Hornbills in urban Singapore.

Story Origins

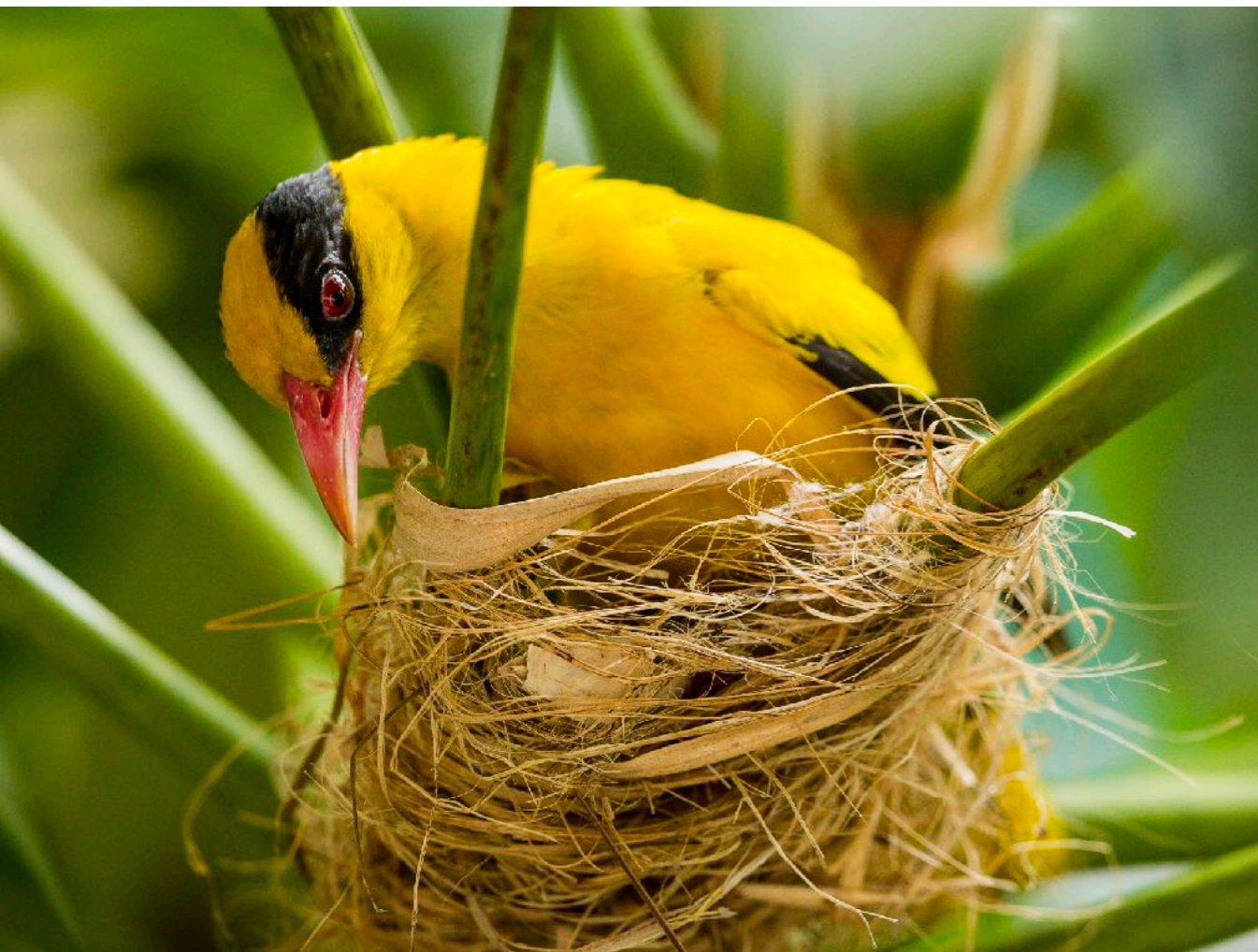
Tim Plowden first made reference to nest predation by hornbills in an article published in the April 2019 issue of *Nature Watch*.

At this stage he relied on anecdotes by local bird photographers and naturalists about the hornbill flock's nest raiding activity. During these conversations, it was clear that the hornbill's reputation was taking a turn for the worse.

Relocation and culling were suggested by some, but many perceived hornbills as pests. Tim took an interest for several reasons. "I was intrigued by the relationship between people and hornbills in Singapore. I also learned about hornbills from my video assignment for BirdLife International in 2018 and I'd become fascinated by their intelligence."

Earlier in 2018 Tim lost a sunbird nest from his balcony. "I suspected hornbills but couldn't be sure. When an oriole pair started to build a nest behind my apartment a unique opportunity presented itself to unravel the mystery."





Filming the Nest

The welfare of the subject is more important than the image to Tim and he did whatever he could to avoid disturbing the nesting orioles. His conservation experience helped when he studied their breeding behaviour.

He mapped out the oriole's breeding cycle and created a timetable of when to expect the different stages. This provided the foundation of the production.

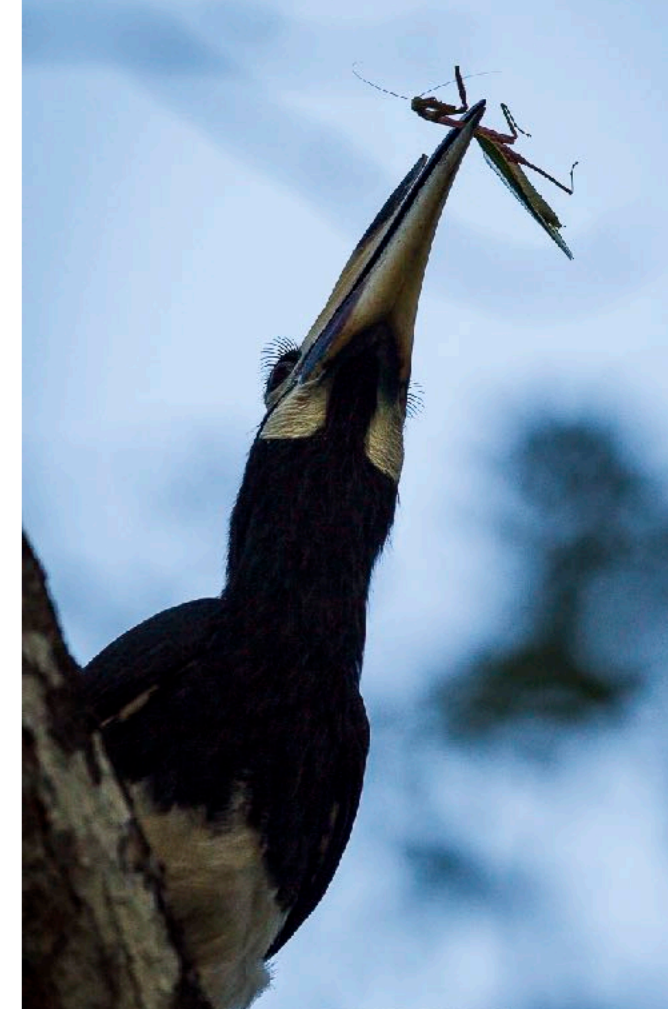
"I set up a hide in my store room to film activity at the nest. I improvised by gaffer taping a sarong to the window opening which overlooked the nest." This was a blind with an authentic Asian twist and the orioles were at ease throughout the filming (except when the hornbills visited).

Filming the Flock

When nest predation by the hornbill became a likelihood, Tim had to factor them into the story as an antagonist. Having spent a considerable amount of time with the flock he realised how rare an occurrence nest predation is.

Tim filmed the majority of the hornbill footage in his local park and in a nearby public housing estate. This flock visited the trees outside his apartment too. So they knew Tim well.

“I was already quite familiar with the local flock, but it was only by spending longer with them that I discovered where they roosted at night. This allowed me to explore more about their relationship with people. Locals had taken them to heart and hand fed them fruit every evening.”





Urban by Nature

A lack of buffer between urban Singapore and its forested areas has resulted in people living cheek by jowl with their wild neighbours.

Singapore is an island city-state that has experienced rapid deforestation and urbanisation over recent decades. Since 1819, it has lost 98% of its original forest cover. A wildlife extinction rate of 73% is now estimated in this island where forest reserves cover only 0.25% of its area.

Condominiums, private and public housing estates are located next to forest reserves, coastal areas, mangrove remnants and along other waterways.

Native wildlife has little choice but to explore the concrete jungle. A "City in Nature" means there are several species which have adapted to Singapore's urban environment and are commonly seen.

"The hornbill is very adaptable and is conspicuous enough to attract attention even when it silently preys on nests."



Academic Research

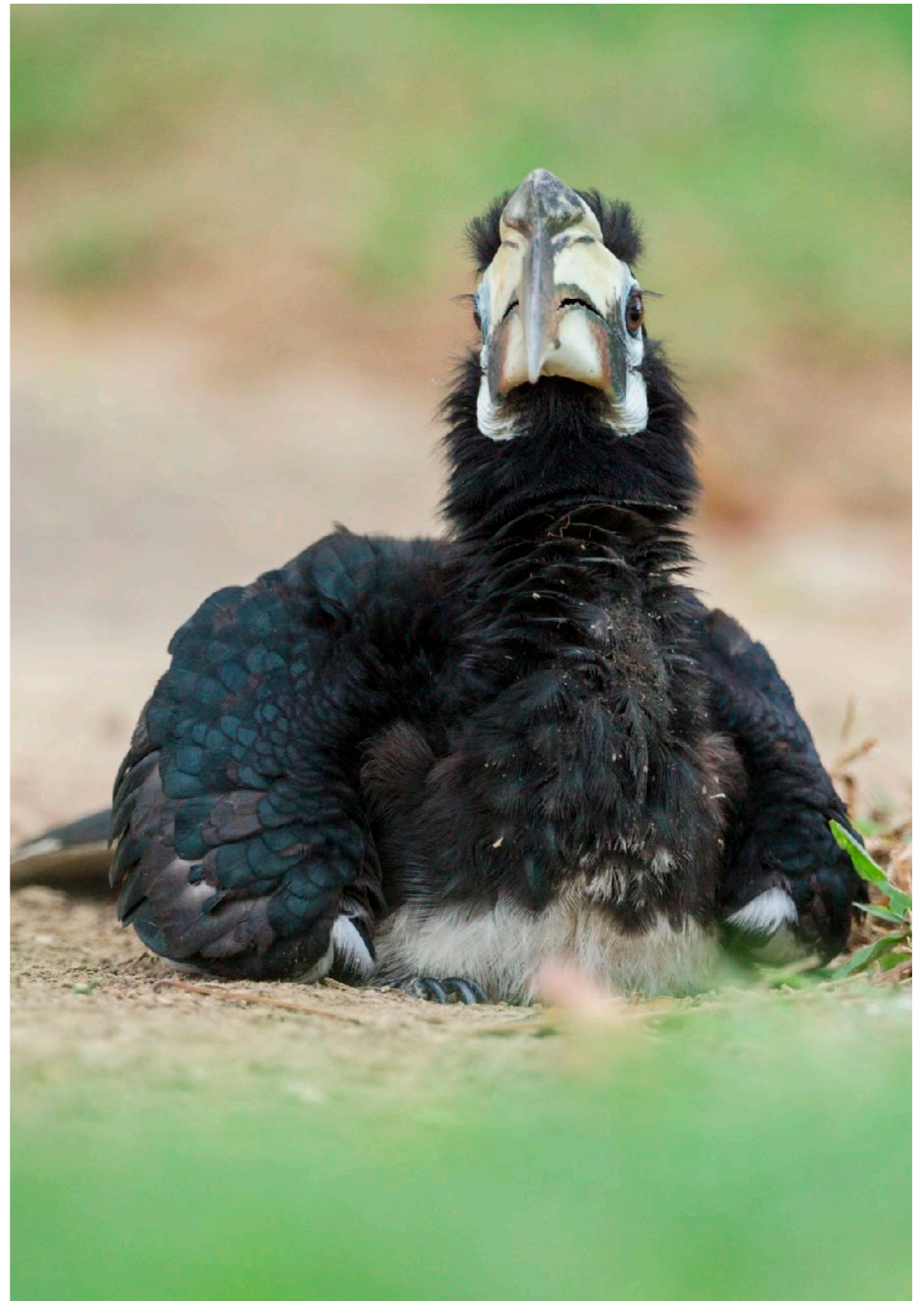
Tim's comments about nest predation stirred enough curiosity among local conservationists and academics for a research paper to be set in motion.

At the same time as Tim's article about social dust bathing was published in the magazine of Nature Society (Singapore), the oriole pair had started to build their nest behind his apartment.

After Tim filmed the oriole nest predation attempts by the hornbills, he was able to contribute to a research article on the subject. This has now been published in BirdingASIA magazine.

"I'd already started my own literature review on nest predation while filming and that's how I stumbled upon the urban predator paradox. The paradox applies to most predators, but not to this intelligent social omnivore!"

"There is still a lot more to discover about hornbills. For example, how they cooperate during nest predation."





Collaborators

Teamwork makes the dream work and Tim is indebted to his network of close collaborators.

The journey started in 2019 with his wife **Reehana Shihab** encouraging him to film the oriole nest. Her contributions to the story and script can be found throughout the film.

Another important member of the team, is voice over artist, **Ian Russell**. Ian is a full-time professional for whom Tim has a deep professional respect. They have worked together on two conservation video assignments and Tim didn't hesitate to commission Ian again. Tim knew when he was filming that Ian was the voice of the production.

Ian hosted a live recording session online which allowed Tim the opportunity to provide direction and watch art in action. Ian also contributed suggestions to tweak the script which was a tremendous value add.

Throughout 2020 Tim completed several certified courses in social and behaviour change



Two juvenile hornbills play in a palm tree next to a beach.

communications for a wildlife trade project in Singapore. One such course was *Making Moves* by **Brooke Tully**. When Tim asked Brooke for her feedback on his messaging she was kind enough to provide very detailed feedback.

Last but not least are the contributions of Tim's family who are his closest confidants. Tim's brother, **Giles Plowden** is a talented artist and has been a constant sounding board for ideas over the decades. His suggestions inspired Tim to strive for greater artistry.

Tim's mum, **Ann Plowden** is a retired artist and ran her own transatlantic creative business for over 20 years. Her professional training as a proofreader, meant that her inputs to the script really were the icing on the cake.

About Lens & Pens

The brainchild of Reehana Shihab has its roots 10 years ago when Tim was in Africa and Reehana wrote blog posts to accompany his images.

“Life is what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans”, as John Lennon famously sang and life is precisely what happened to Reehana and Tim with their marriage and a daughter to keep them occupied while juggling their respective freelance careers.

Cherished aspirations of working together have crystallised over time and in early 2021 they registered Lens and Pens as a business in Singapore.

Reehana and Tim are driven by a passion to share what they love: exploring the wonders of nature and interacting with different cultures. They have already seen the benefits of sharing what they love with their daughter, Iman Amelia.

Their mission is to empower other parents to instil an appreciation of nature in their children.





Contact Details

For queries about the production, image licensing or anything else related to hornbills in Singapore, please drop Tim a line and he will be only too happy to help you.

Email: tim@lensandpens.com.sg

Mobile: +65 8107 7728

Website: www.lensandpens.com.sg

Links

Find out more in Tim's related articles, research papers and video production to raise awareness about hornbill conservation topics in Southeast Asia.

RELATED ARTICLES

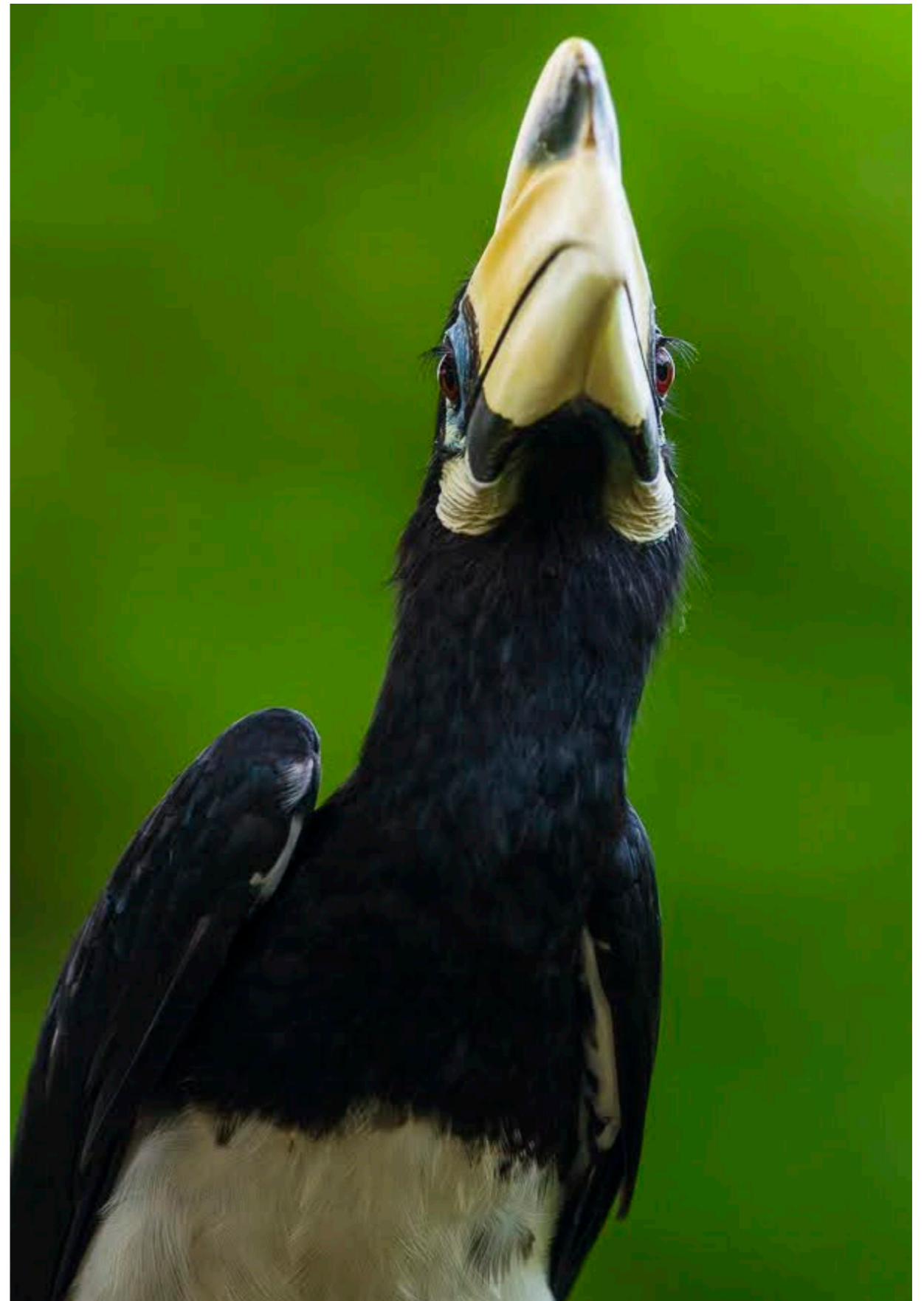
["Hornbill Social Dust Bath"](#) Nature Watch Vol 27 No.2 Apr - Jun 2019

RELATED RESEARCH

["Nest predation by Oriental Pied Hornbills *Anthracoceros albirostris* in urban Singapore"](#) BirdingASIA 35 (2021): 86-91

RELATED VIDEO

[Helmeted Hornbill video for BirdLife International](#)



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