

Conservation Connect With JEFF CORWIN

By Lavanya Sunkara

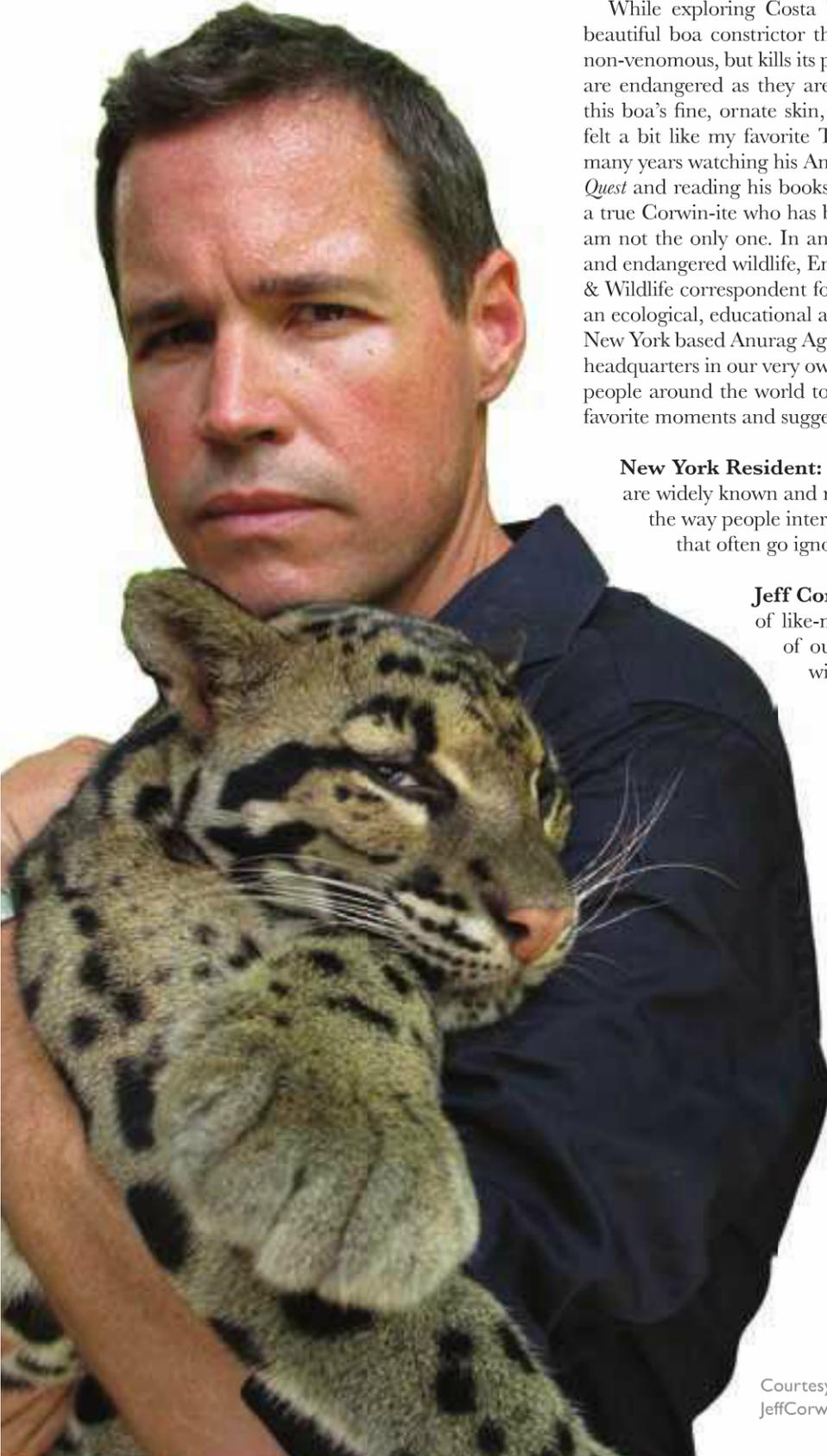
While exploring Costa Rica recently, I was fortunate to have encountered a beautiful boa constrictor that wandered in front of our hotel. I knew that it was non-venomous, but kills its prey by wrapping around it. Some boa constrictor species are endangered as they are excessively hunted for their exotic skin. As I touched this boa's fine, ornate skin, while it was being gently held by the security guard, I felt a bit like my favorite TV host and wildlife expert Jeff Corwin. Having spent many years watching his Animal Planet shows, *The Jeff Corwin Experience* and *Corwin's Quest* and reading his books, *Living on the Edge* and *100 Heartbeats*, I consider myself a true Corwin-ite who has been inspired by his conservation message. Thankfully, I am not the only one. In an attempt to gather those who care for the environment and endangered wildlife, Emmy winning Corwin, who currently serves as a Science & Wildlife correspondent for NBC, has started **JeffCorwinConnect.com (JCC)**, an ecological, educational and entertainment multimedia company. Partnering with New York based Anurag Agarwal, who is the CEO and co-founder of JCC, and with headquarters in our very own concrete jungle, Corwin hopes that JCC will empower people around the world to be environmental stewards. Here, he shares his hopes, favorite moments and suggest ways to get more involved.

New York Resident: Your passion for wildlife and dedication to conservation are widely known and respected. How do you see JeffCorwinConnect changing the way people interact with one another and share information about issues that often go ignored by mainstream media?

Jeff Corwin: The mission of JCC is to build a global community of like-minded folks when it comes to the environmental future of our planet. We want to create a social experience around wildlife and conservation so people can rediscover their connection to their planet, its species, ecosystems and one another. Whether you live in a Kenyan Massai boma, a high-rise in NYC or an Inuit community in the arctic, we want JCC to be a tool to empower you as an environmental steward and global citizen. JCC is a place where you can share your stories, get important and timely information on wildlife, ecology and environmental conservation, and become a partner in saving our planet's endangered wildlife and wild places. If there is an environmental issue in your community or you just want to know more about the state of our planet, JCC is the place to go to find out what you can do to make a difference.

NYR: Raising awareness among youngsters about the natural world is one of your main goals. *Your Backyard is Wild* in the Junior Explorer Series about two budding young naturalists' visit to their cousin's house in Brooklyn is one of my favorites. Not many of the kids in cities like New York are in touch with nature. How could parents get children excited about the environment?

JC: It all begins in your own backyard. At first glance, the urban canvas seems the least likely place for nature, but if you know where to look, a family seeking wild



encounters can make wonderful discoveries. That's why I wanted my first book in the *Your Backyard is Wild* series to take place in the urban environment. Just a few minutes in Central Park or in one of the designated green spaces along the Bronx River can reveal some neat ecological moments. These books are intended to inspire and encourage kids and their families to get outside and explore. So head into your backyard, local park or nature preserve, armed with a field guide, camera, binoculars, notebook, and magnifying glass, and get ready to be wowed by your non-human neighbors sharing your habitat. We also want to arm teachers, educators and parents with these books and lesson guides to help them bring eco-education into the classroom and home schooling world. We recently launched JeffCorwinConnect Publishing, which will release a series of graphic novels with this mission in mind.

NYR: JeffCorwinConnect will be publishing *The Black Tide*, a graphic novel about the environmental impact of the 2010 Gulf Coast oil spill set to release on its one year anniversary. Could you share why you decided this topic to be the first in the new Adventure series?

JC: Covering the gulf oil spill for NBC had a profound impact on me, and I wanted to find a way to crystallize the complexities of this unprecedented catastrophe in a manner that'd be accessible to young people. Packaging the compelling tale of habitat and wildlife pushed to the brink because of irresponsible and negligent behavior was a priority for me, and I think that *The Black Tide* will accomplish that mission. While it is a fictional story about an adolescent boy who becomes a conservation hero after finding himself caught up in the drama of an oil spill and its impact on wildlife, the tenor of *The Black Tide* is very real, as we all

witnessed with the oil spill. We will continue to use the graphic novel medium to connect kids with stories that educate them through fantasy-adventures to different ecosystems/species and educate them about the environmental challenges of those environments.

NYR: The fate of the endangered species that you discuss in both your MSNBC show and book, *100 Heartbeats* lies in our hands. How can people make a difference?

JC: The first step is to recognize that all of us are accountable, responsible and ultimately powerful when it comes to the future for life on Earth. The most dangerous adversary to conservation is a sense of being helpless or powerless. No matter what your age is, or your economic standing, we all can make a difference. The successes and failures to protect wild creatures and wild places on our planet are manifested through consumerism, politics, advocacy, and our connection to the communities where we live. Conservation begins in our own backyards, radiating out through the community and then beyond. The fundamentals for saving the planet are protecting habitat and wild species, reducing waste (each of us produces 5 to 8 pounds of non-biodegradable waste every day!) and managing the impact of climate change through dramatically reducing greenhouse output. By genuinely, and not cosmetically, focusing on these three factors, we will go a long way towards saving our planet.

NYR: You've traveled everywhere in the world and witnessed some amazing conservation efforts. Could you share one of your favorite success stories?

JC: There have been many "favorite moments", but one that really pulses deep within my spirit was when I was fortunate

enough to help a young Sumatran orangutan, who had been orphaned and burned by poachers, take to the treetops for the first time, wild and free, after 5 years of rehabilitation. To witness the moment when this very special and endangered great-ape melted into the verdant canopy of this remote rain forest was both exhilarating and sobering.

NYR: Do you anticipate a tipping point of sorts in the next few years where people understand that the fate of the human species is intertwined with that of the other species in this world?

JC: Climate change and habitat loss, fueled by the unsustainable population growth of our species, are the great players in what the future will bring. If we stay on our present course, most leading conservationists believe that we will likely lose half of all species on earth midway through this century. The tipping point will likely be when we witness an iconic species of endangered wildlife, for example polar bear, tiger, mountain gorilla, or other charismatic species, finally fall prey to extinction as a result of our negligence.

NYR: How will you be celebrating Earth Day? Which project are you headed off to next?

JC: I am returning to the Gulf of Mexico to follow up on stories I did last summer for NBC and MSNBC to be broadcasted on the one year anniversary of the oil spill. This Earth Day, I am a keynote speaker at a University in Texas.

To join the discussion, please visit
JeffCorwinConnect.com
[www.twitter.com/iamjeffcorwin](https://twitter.com/iamjeffcorwin)
www.facebook.com/jeffcorwinconnect

WAYS TO CELEBRATE MOTHER EARTH THIS MONTH

- Earth Fair at Grand Central Earthdayny.org
April 22 (11am-7pm) - 23 (11am -5pm): Outdoor festival of art and music along with green business exhibits, organic food and interactive displays by environmental groups.
April 21- 23: Indoor exhibition of latest green innovations by leading companies.
- Earth Day in Times Square Earthdayny.org
April 22: Entertainment, speakers and an interactive exhibit area showcasing green businesses. Also featuring a CO2 E drive, a "runway show" with all types of green transportation.
- Crafts: Earth Day in Central Park Nycgovparks.org
April 21: (2pm - 4 pm) Nature-inspired crafts fit for all ages at the Chess & Checkers House in the Park.
- Bronx Zoo Run for the Wild Bronxzoo.com, wcs.org
April 30: (8:30am - 11:30am) Bronx Zoo's annual Wildlife Conservation Society's 5k Run/Walk to raise funds for penguin conservation.

