

SUMMER/FALL 2015

# EINSTEIN

THE MAGAZINE FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS OF ALBERT EINSTEIN COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

## SOLVING RETT SYNDROME

Scientists at Einstein and Montefiore are seeking ways to treat this rare disease and help locked-in patients communicate with the outside world



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## Picturing Where the Wild Things Are

*A scientist's backyard provides plenty of photo ops*

by NELLY EDMONDSON

Jayanta Roy-Chowdhury, M.B.B.S., has been interested in photography for decades. When he arrived in the United States in 1968, fresh out of medical school in his native Kolkata (formerly known as Calcutta), India, the first thing he bought was a camera.

His idea of a great photo is one that “does something other than describe exactly what it is. I like pictures that stir the emotions or show interaction,” he explains. “You can do this often with birds because they are always posing. If you keep your eyes open, you can tell a lot of stories with birds.”

Dr. Roy-Chowdhury, a professor of medicine and of genetics and scientific director of the gene therapy facility at Einstein, remembers the day he was standing at his living room window in New Rochelle when a scarlet tanager swooped toward him. “It was trying to enter through the glass,” he recalls.

He grabbed his camera, and as the bird approached the window for a second try, Dr. Roy-Chowdhury took what turned out to be a gorgeous picture of the creature in flight, fiercely beating its wings, before it realized its folly and flew safely away. “There is always something happening,” says Dr. Roy-Chowdhury. “Nature comes to us!”

Dr. Roy-Chowdhury credits his brother, a wildlife expert, with awakening his interest first in birds and then in the rest of the animal kingdom. Foxes, deer and other animals abound in the woods



Above, yawning hippo, Amboseli, Kenya; top, scarlet tanager at the window, New Rochelle, NY.



Top, lion cub cuddling with mother, Maasai Mara, Kenya; middle, painted storks flying at sunset, Gujarat, India; bottom, baya weavers and nest, Amboseli, Kenya.

in back of his Westchester home. One year, he gathered pictures taken from his windows and exhibited them in the Indian Academy of Fine Arts in Kolkata.

To photograph more-exotic fauna, Dr. Roy-Chowdhury and his wife travel abroad every year. They recently visited northeast India with their son, a professional sitar player. There, Dr. Roy-Chowdhury got magnificent shots of wild elephants, rhinoceroses, buffaloes and gibbons. In his office at Einstein, he shows off a picture of a mother lion playing with her male cub, taken during a trip to Maasai Mara, Kenya, in 2011. "We think of lions as killers," he says, "but this interaction is so tender."

A member of Einstein's faculty since 1975, Dr. Roy-Chowdhury is now developing gene- and cell-based therapies for inherited liver diseases. He has had some success transplanting healthy liver cells into animals as well as into patients. And he sees a definite link between his work and his hobby. "Creativity in art is the same as creativity in science," he says. "Designing an experiment requires a lot of mental work, and with photography, you are always planning the next shot. Both activities tickle my pleasure center."

Not everything can be photographed—a problem Dr. Roy-Chowdhury solves with another activity he enjoys: painting in acrylics. "I paint things I cannot capture in photographs," he explains, such as "a bird transferring a fish to its mate, or a moving train that passes through in a flash."

Leaving for work one recent morning, Dr. Roy-Chowdhury saw a V-shaped skein of Canada geese flying above his house. He ran inside to get his camera, but by the time he returned, the birds had flown away. Dr. Roy-Chowdhury wasn't discouraged. "I am a visual person," he says. "Every day, I find something new to take a picture of!" **E**