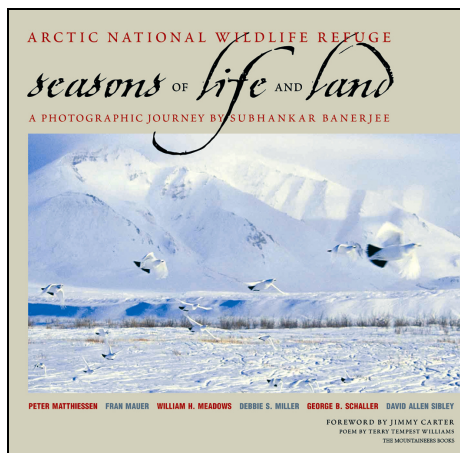


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Arctic National Wildlife Refuge: Seasons of Life and Land

Please buy this book and share it with all your friends. I have looked deeply, deeply into the glorious spirit of the Arctic Refuge—revealed in these magnificent images. My soul is enriched—I am singing.

—Jane Goodall



- Photo exhibit, Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, May 2-September 2, 2003; American Museum of Natural History, November 1, 2003-March 7, 2004
- Photographer Subhankar Banerjee's work was instrumental in the April 2002 and March 2003 decisions of the U.S. Senate to prevent oil drilling within the Refuge
- Original essays by Peter Matthiessen, David Allen Sibley, George Schaller, and more; foreword by Jimmy Carter
- Endorsements from Jane Goodall, Barry Lopez, Robert Redford, Edward O. Wilson
- Pre-publication excerpts in *Outside* and *Natural History* magazines
- 10-city author tour by Subhankar Banerjee, May/June 2003

Subhankar Banerjee was drawn to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to photograph polar bears in the wild—and fell in love with the land the Gwich'in people call "The Sacred Place Where Life Begins." He devoted fourteen months over two years to documenting the landscape, its wild species, and its native peoples. This is the first comprehensive photographic portrait of the refuge in all four seasons. With Inupiat guide Robert Thompson, Banerjee traveled 4000 miles on foot, raft, kayak, and snowmobile to prove that the refuge pulses with life year around—and that leaving this biological heartland free from commercial development is vital to the survival of this unique ecosystem. **ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE: Seasons of Life and Land** (The Mountaineers Books, **May 2, 2003**; published simultaneously in hardcover at \$35 and in paperback at \$22.95) tells a story in 200 breath-taking color images. Banerjee's photos are paired with original essays by **Peter Matthiessen**, **David Allen Sibley**, and **George Schaller**, among others, with a foreword by former president **Jimmy Carter**.

Banerjee's work has already helped impact public policy. His images were used extensively by the members of the U.S. Senate, the House, and conservation groups during the 2001-2002 debate on energy legislation. On March 19, 2003 **Senator Barbara Boxer, D-California**, held aloft an advance rush copy of the book on the Senate floor as she rallied opposition to a proposal to open the refuge to oil exploration "I wish every Member could have the chance to take a look at this beautiful book, *Arctic National Wildlife Refuge: Seasons of Life and Land*," said Boxer. **A solo exhibition of Banerjee's images**, also entitled "Arctic National Wildlife Refuge: Seasons of Life and Land," **will debut at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History** in Washington, DC (May 2–September 2, 2003) and will subsequently travel to the **American Museum of Natural History in New York** in October 2003.

A photographic record that belies charges of “flat white nothingness”

Through images and insightful essays, **Seasons of Life and Land** presents a complete year-round cycle of the landscape, animals, plants, birds, and indigenous peoples of the refuge. The images in the book flow through the seasons, beginning in winter, continuing through the abbreviated yet tremendously prolific spring-summer-autumn, and ending in winter again. The proponents of oil drilling have said that the coastal plain of the refuge is “white and barren; void of any life” for nine months of the year. This perception exists perhaps because few people have traveled to the refuge outside of the short spring and summer seasons. “During the harsh winter months when the temperature drops to minus 40 F or lower, not only does life thrive there, but new life is born,” says Banerjee. “Some of my most powerful photographs were taken during the winter months in the refuge.”

The refuge is the place in all Alaska where early-forming snowdrifts most often tempt the polar bear to den. It is host to more than 160 resident and migratory bird species that journey from six continents and all fifty states to nest and rear their young or to feed. Because of the massive herds of porcupine caribou who converge upon the coastal plain to calve each spring, it is known as “the American Serengeti.” To the uninitiated, the land might appear austere...until details emerge within the pages of **Seasons of Life and Land**.

A threatened Buff-Breasted Sandpiper dancing in open-winged courtship display. The tracks of a polar bear and her cubs just emerged from the den, shown in sharp relief on the snow. The American dipper, a year-round resident bird that finds open water to feed even at 40 degrees below zero. Moose foraging for vegetation exposed from the snow on the wind-scoured plain. Patches of rare Siberian phlox carpeting the foothills of the towering Brooks Range. Gwich'in Athabascan Indian children performing the Raven Dance, a story about sharing with other creatures of our planet and keeping the earth healthy. An Inupiat Eskimo cemetery with whalebone monuments rising toward heaven. Banerjee's images reveal a land where wildlife and native peoples have coexisted in harmony for thousands of years.

But climate change has already begun to stress the land and its species. The magnificent McCall Glacier, measured to have lost more than 30 feet in depth in the last 40 years. The northward march of the dwarf willow, moving at a pace not seen in 8000 years. The alarming decline of the musk ox population (forced by deeper winter snows to forage farther inland where their calves are vulnerable to predators). These changes are also documented in words and images in **Seasons of Life and Land**.

Banerjee includes eight short stories on his experiences in the field

In addition to his photographic record, Banerjee tells eight short stories about his most memorable experiences in the field, to let the readers feel what he felt, see what he saw, as if they were standing next to him. In “Coastal Plain: Home of the Ice Bear,” Banerjee tells of a day on March 23, 2002, on the Canning River delta when he spotted a polar bear with her two cubs just emerged from their den. He is mesmerized at the sight: For the next half hour the bear and her cubs play on the bank—running, nuzzling, sharing moments of affection—before returning to their den. In the hope of seeing the bears again, Banerjee and his Inupiat guide, Robert Thompson, spent the next twenty-nine days camping on the Arctic plain, braving blizzard conditions and minus 40 degrees F temperatures, watching and waiting from behind a blind of snow and ice. They never saw the bears again; in such strong blizzards they never found footprints indicating when they left the den. “But that one day of viewing the bear and her cubs play...made all those blizzard days seem worthwhile,” says Banerjee. “It was truly the wildest scene I witnessed during my stay at the refuge.”

Essays by prominent authorities on the special nature of the Arctic Refuge included

Peter Matthiessen, “In the Great Country”

The acclaimed author of The Tree Where Man Was Born, The Snow Leopard (winner of the Pulitzer Prize), and many other works of fiction and nonfiction describes the wonders of his time in the field with Subhankar Banerjee and the reasons this wilderness must be saved for future generations.

“When the fog clears at midmorning, we can see across the water the soaring prospect of the northernmost mountains of the New World, rising from the sunny mists to 9,000 feet; the peaks appear impregnable, majestic. Because the mountains here come close to the sea, the coastal plain is scarcely twenty miles across, but in this clear air the distance looks like six at the most. From the mainland shore comes thunder, cannonades, for the river ice in the Kongakut is restless. The remote plain has few visitors, and most of these few—unaware, perhaps, of its astonishing biodiversity—find it bleak and barren. But in the endless sunshine of the Arctic summer, in this rare light, the soft greens of the tundra and the shadows of the mountains seem deeply harmonious. The very cleanliness is beautiful, if only because man has sullied most of the New World south of those mountains and will do the same for this continental edge, if the oil industry is permitted to exploit it.”

David Allen Sibley, “Visiting the Birds at Their Summer Home”

Sibley, author of The Sibley Guide to Birds and The Sibley Guide to Bird Behavior, accepted Banerjee’s invitation to see the Arctic plain thronged with birds from six continents and all fifty states, drawn there each the spring to nest or feed. The experience drives home how intimately connected the refuge is to us all.

“The tundra might seem like a world apart, but to the birds, and the birdwatchers, every place is connected. The male pectoral sandpiper migrating east across the tundra on July 5, while its mate is leading its day-old chicks away from me through the grass, might be the same pectoral sandpiper that I will see on Cape Cod on July 20. The fluffy chicks struggling to make their way through the tundra grasses will gather in flocks and arrive in northeastern United States in September. I can imagine seeing the sandhill crane with its young, still traveling as a family, wintering with hundreds of other crane families in the Central Valley of California.... Many times when we encounter a new species during the week, Robert and Subhankar ask, ‘where does that bird come from?’ Each time the question catches me off guard. I think, ‘What does this question mean? We are looking at a female with young—right here is where these birds come from!’”

George Schaller, “Arctic Legacy”

Schaller, a renowned field biologist and author and, since 1998, (The Year of the Gorilla, The Last Panda, and The Serengeti Lion) is currently the Director for Science at the Wildlife Conservation Society in New York. Schaller recalls the splendor of his time on the land in 1956, a young member of the Murie expedition to Alaska that resulted in the establishment of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Almost half a century later, he is still committed to seeking final protection status.

“Few people will ever visit this remote place. But one need not see a grizzly or a throng of caribou or fog-shrouded peaks rising above nameless valleys to benefit from their presence. Wilderness values are too precious to permit them to succumb to special interests.... Given the increasing exploitation of natural resources in the Arctic, we need an undamaged ecosystem to provide a baseline from which to compare, measure, and record climate-induced and other environmental changes.... There is as yet no “environmentally sensitive” way to extract oil. Those who find splendor in industrial sprawl and pollution can now seek spiritual solace at Prudhoe Bay.”

William H. Meadows, “Arctic Refuge: Key to Saving Wild America “

The president of the Wilderness Society writes on the history of efforts to preserve this wildest of wild places, and why the Arctic Refuge has assumed such great political importance.

“It is certainly not the first of America’s great places whose greatness was not immediately apparent to everyone, and not the first that took some imagination to understand. Theodore Roosevelt’s decision to name the Grand Canyon a national monument in 1908 met with significant opposition from people who considered it any ugly place, suitable chiefly for copper mining. Twenty years later, only a few people opposed the grand plan to drain the Everglades; after all, what good could there be in a swamp? It may be even harder for some people to recognize the greatness of the coastal plain simply because it is so remote that few people will ever see it... If the coastal plain is opened to development, the land rush will be on everywhere. If we can’t protect the place that has been the keystone of our

work for all these years, the people who have a different vision of the land—of exploiting it, taming it, managing it, making nature work for our short-term gain—will know that we probably can't stop them anywhere else. That is why the coastal plain has assumed such great political importance, and why the debate continues to make front page news.”

Fran Mauer, “Our Geography of Hope”

A wildlife biologist who served at the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from 1981 to 2002, Mauer leads a virtual trek across the refuge to showcase the features that make this part of the planet so special. From the shores of the Arctic Ocean and across the Arctic tundra, from the mountains of the Brooks Range and on to the boreal forest, the journey is astonishingly varied and full of life.

“In the far northeast corner of Alaska there is still hope. With establishment of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, we were able to protect an entire spectrum of Arctic and sub-Arctic systems in their original condition. How rare and valuable is this area? We can scarcely imagine...Here hope exists for improving our knowledge of how natural ecosystems function. Here there is hope that, with such knowledge, we may begin to transform how we relate to nature outside of protected areas. Here is hope that this place, the Arctic Refuge, can inspire us to seek more sustainable ways of existing on our planet. In the refuge we have both a touchstone to our past and guiding light to our future. It took great vision and wisdom to advocate for establishment of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and the preservation of its wilderness. Do we have the same resolve to keep it wild, forever?”

Debbie S. Miller, “Clinging to an Arctic Homeland”

In 1975 Miller and her husband, Dennis, moved to teach in Arctic Village, Alaska, a Gwich'in Athabascan Indian village on the southern boundary of the refuge. Over the past 28 years Miller and her family, now based in Fairbanks, have explored the refuge on many trips through all its seasons.

“While the cash economy differs substantially between the North Slope Inupiat and the Gwich'in, I'm struck by the underlying similarities between the two cultures. Both the Inupiat and the Gwich'in are still deeply connected to the land and the waters around them. They share a profound love for their homeland. They both hunt and fish to feed their families and their neighbors. They share similar religious traditions. The Inupiat and the Gwich'in both know that all the money in the world can never buy a bowhead whale or a wandering caribou herd. Money cannot replace a wilderness or a homeland, once it's lost. The value of these Arctic resources, which has sustained two distinct cultures for centuries, runs much deeper than any oil well, any pocketbook. The cultural value of this great Arctic wilderness transcends the power of corporations and governments, of dividend checks and jobs.“

About Subhankar Banerjee

Subhankar Banerjee is a freelance photographer specializing in wildlife, environmental, and cultural photography. Born in India in 1967, Banerjee received his bachelor's degree in engineering before moving to the United States where he obtained master's degrees in physics and computer science. Before turning to photography, Banerjee worked as a scientist at Los Alamos National Lab in New Mexico and at Boeing in Seattle. He is the recipient of the David Housberg Wilderness Image Award from the Alaska Conservation Foundation; his images have appeared in *Outside* magazine, *Natural History*, and the publications of the National Audubon Society and the Wilderness Society. He has lectured to groups including the National Arts Club and The Wilderness Society. The Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, Washington, DC, has sponsored a traveling exhibit of his Arctic Refuge images. Banerjee is based in Bellevue, Washington.

ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE: Seasons of Life and Land

May 2, 2003 176 pp. trim 11" x 11" 200 color photographs

\$39.95 hardcover, 0-89886-909-9 \$29.95 trade paperback, 0-89886-438-0