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FACULTY OF SCIENCE
THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
香港大學 理學院

HKU PhD student wins silver in renowned international photo competition with his stunning capture of snake portraits

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Sam Yue, local nature photographer and PhD student in Ecology & Biodiversity at the HKU School of Biological Sciences, won two honours in this year's Prix de la Photographie, a prestigious international photo competition. Competing with photographers from over 85 countries, Sam's entry titled "Serpent" was awarded the Second Prize and an Honorable Mention in the Nature category.

The Prix de la Photographie is juried by top international executives in the photography industry. Each year, they select winners from thousands of photos all over the world. Honorable Mentions are awarded to acknowledge talent as the judges see fit. Winning photos will be published in the annual book and some will be exhibited in a high-profile gallery in Paris.

Sam's winning portfolio consists of vivid portraits of wide snakes encountered during his travels in Asia to places including Borneo, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Through his lens, Sam was able to portray the cute and beautiful side of snakes. The photos were all taken in the wild at night, using a special flash setup.

"This is my first time entering an international competition. I did not expect to win – I just wanted to try my luck. It's so incredible that I have won silver and I am thrilled to represent Hong Kong," said Sam.

"It is uncommon for a snake to be in a winning photo, so I am elated that my snake photos have actually won silver, showing that snakes too can be beautiful and majestic. Many people are afraid of snakes and frogs, thinking that they are slimy, aggressive, and disgusting, but once you get to observe one in the wild, you will find that they are super cute and gentle. I hope my photos can dispel such misconceptions. I am also proud to include Hong Kong's Bamboo Pit Viper, photographed in a country park, in my entry, showing that our city, though giving an impression of a concrete jungle, is in fact the home of amazing and diverse wildlife," he added.

Sam is a freelance wildlife photographer, he often shares his photos on his Facebook page to spread more awareness. Growing up abroad, his childhood idol is the "Crocodile Hunter" Steve Irwin, who also travels the world finding animals. Sam particularly likes to photograph at night which he remarked: "when most animals are active". He prefers to venture out alone, and feels that the jungle at night "is magical, kind of like the movie Avatar".

Sam stayed in the jungles of Borneo for one year from 2013-14, studying mammal ecology and photographing on the side. His adventures now take him to Hong Kong, where he has already captured many of Hong Kong's special creatures, such as the Romer's tree frog. "With beady eyes and

a wide smile, I think frogs are super cute,” he said. Because Hong Kong is a subtropical region, Sam thinks “we still have a lot of wildlife, even though they are constantly under threat from development”.

Instead of photographing popular animals such as lions and elephants, Sam tends to focus on less known species like snakes, frogs and insects. "Most people are only familiar with the big 'charismatic' animals despite the rich diversity of life on Earth. My goal in nature photography is to raise more awareness and appreciation for less 'popular' creatures on our planet."

Sam graduated with a MS in Zoology at University of British Columbia, Canada. He is now doing a PhD at HKU, and will study elephants in Thailand and Malaysia for his research project.

For more information of Sam and his works, please visit: [fb.com/samyuephoto](https://www.facebook.com/samyuephoto)

For more information of the competition **Prix de la Photographie**, please visit: <http://px3.fr>

For media enquiries, please contact Ms Cindy Chan, Senior Communication Manager of HKU Faculty of Science (tel: 3917 5286/ 6703 0212; email: cindycst@hku.hk) or Mr Sam Yue, School of Biological Sciences, HKU at yuesam@hku.hk.

Image download and illustration:

<http://www.scifac.hku.hk/news/media?page=1>

Photo credits: Sam Yue

Photo captions:

1. Dark headed cat snake, Sabah, Borneo



2. Vine snake, Sarawak, Borneo



3. Bamboo pit viper, Hong Kong



4. Green tree viper, Taiwan



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