

## FEATURE

## Observing Eye

A dance between art and science, Sanna Kannisto's theatrical images place her subjects centre stage of her outdoor studio, delicately drawing attention to ecological questions threatening their future.

*Photographs by Sanna Kannisto  
Text by Sophie Wright*



In Sanna Kannisto's clean and minimal studies, the animals and plants she photographs become the protagonists of a small, yet theatrical, stage. Stationed at her curious portable studio, planted outdoors in the midst of nature, the Finnish photographer works al fresco, carefully constructing the scene in front of her before it is occupied by her winged subjects. Situated in an odd spot between documentary and staged photography, the scenes in *Observing Eye* hark back to the natural sciences. But in her studies, each image is unique—species caught in motion, isolated from their natural environments, seemingly gazing into the lens.



*Luscinia svecica*, 2018 © Sanna Kannisto



For her, the photographic act seems to defamiliarize, capturing and preserving the beauty and mystery of her subjects rather than taming them. Kannisto has been working on her approach for over 15 years, refining her observant eye and trying out new ways of exploring her relationship to, and experience of, nature. She has spent time living and working alongside biologists in rainforests in Peru, Brazil, French Guyana, Costa Rica as well as her native Finland, Italy, Germany and Russia.

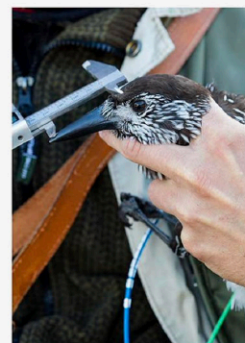


*Carduelis spinus*, 2015 © Sanna Kannisto



Rooted in the traditions of scientific illustration and often drawing on the methods of the community, her work departs into a more subjective visual research—one that often acknowledges the processes and techniques we use to produce knowledge on the natural world around us. A dance between art and science, information and enigma. The intimate glance exchanged between observed and observer becomes all the more poignant in the context of our current ecological crisis.





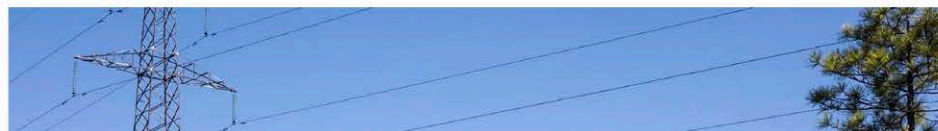
*Forest hide-out, negative, spotted nutcracker being ringed, 2019 © Sanna Kannisto* ✦

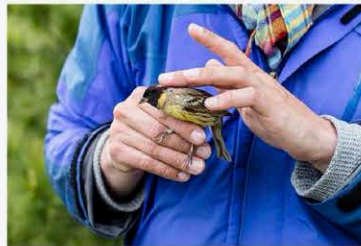
A profound love for the natural world, matched by a similarly deep disturbance at witnessing its disappearance, seem to underpin Kannisto's desire to share the beauty of our environment—for it can be a persuasive force. In *Observing Eye*, several collages piece together images, texts and diagrams contextualize her 'portraits', building a bigger picture of the threats these species face and the landscapes, conservation attempts and research stations that lie behind her work. By bringing us eye-to-eye with those at risk of extinction, Kannisto gently calls to attention the vanishing worlds of birds and insects around us.

Editor's Note: Sanna Kannisto's series was selected as a finalist in this year's **LensCulture Art Photography Awards**. You can check out the other Winners, Juror's Picks and Finalists [here!](#)



*Upupa epops*, 2019 © Sanna Kannisto





*Mountains and wetland at Baikal, Yellow breasted bunting, red-list conservation status, 2019 © Sanna Kannisto*





*Approach of Winter, 2018 © Sanna Kannisto*

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*Papilio machaon*, 2016 © Sanna Kannisto



*Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*, 2019 © Sanna Kannisto







*Duckling on eutrophicated lake, 2019 © Sanna Kannisto*



