

More than just a drawing

Illustrating wildlife is not all about accuracy, illustrator Brendan Wenzel tells **Aneeta Sundararaj**

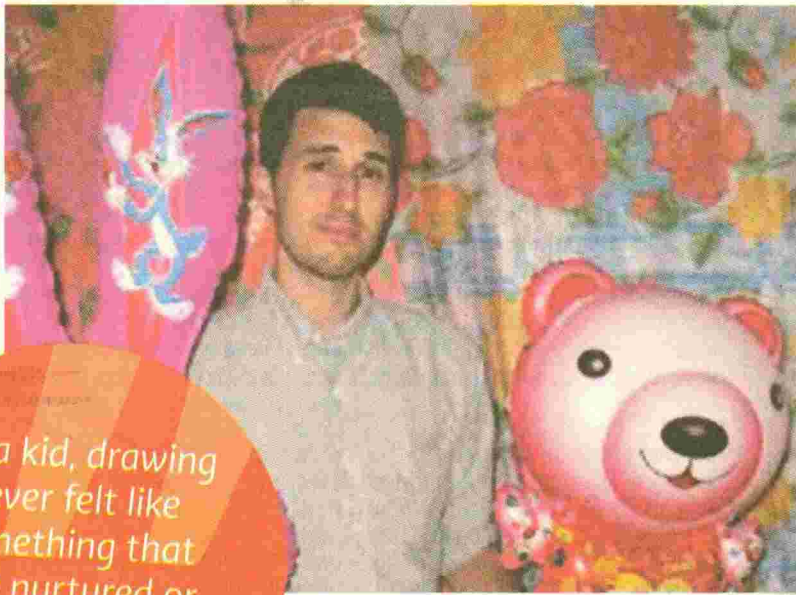
YOU excited 12-year-old shows you a painting he's done but it looks nothing like the tiger he intends meant to draw. He's growing up fast and you wonder if his talent will ever be properly nurtured. Don't worry, says Brendan Wenzel, 31.

"You can ask 20 first graders to draw the same cat and each one is going to see and draw something different," says the talented illustrator. "You line up those drawings and you'll have 20 unique, honest and valid ways of experiencing the same scene. I guarantee everyone there will learn something about themselves, each other and probably the cat as well."

A graduate of the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, Wenzel says his love for animals often "collides" with art and starts with how he grew up in a household full of artists. "My father is an illustrator, my mother an art teacher, and my brother Chris is a great painter," says the native of the small town of Durham, Connecticut, USA.

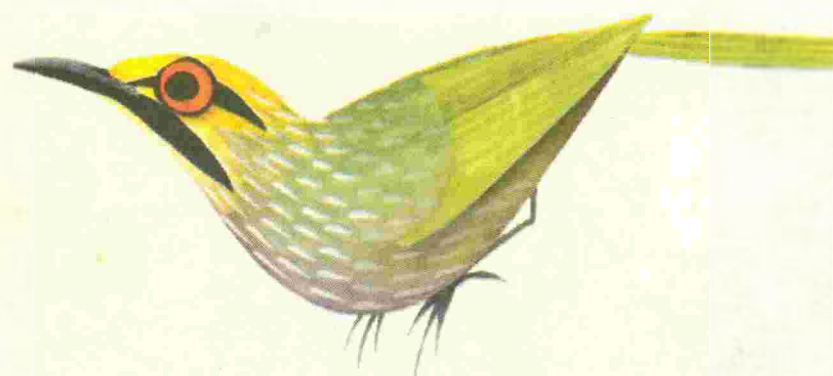
BIRDSEED

"As a kid, drawing never felt like something that was nurtured or encouraged. Drawing and painting were just



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Brendan Wenzel

things everyone around me always did. You ate, you slept, you drew," says Wenzel. "It was always a really big deal in my house when less common birds like an indigo bunting or a rose-breasted grosbeak passed by the bird feeder. My father got visibly excited. Like most kids, I took cues from the adults around me and so the bird feeder became a magical little place. Putting seed out and watching the birds fly off with it back to their own little universe, made the feeder a great portal for connecting with the natural world. Suddenly, that world began to feel a lot less separate and became something I had more of a stake in. Keeping a bird feeder provides the rare opportunity to make an entirely positive impact on the environment."



Some of the regular visitors to his bird feeder will feature in a series of illustrations Wenzel's working on about North American birds. Although he had not been here before, his interest in Southeast Asia and its wild inhabitants grew from two years he spent living in Vietnam. During this time, he made some illustrations of the wildlife in the region. What followed from these illustrations was another sort of "collision"

between animals and art.

SPECIAL POSTERS

"When we came across Brendan's illustrations, we contacted him immediately," says Elizabeth John, senior communications officer with Traffic South East Asia. "We're always looking

for images of animals most affected by illegal trade. Our subject matter is so depressing and most times, we show trapped and traded animals. We leave people disheartened. So when we saw Brendan's pictures, we asked if we could work with him. He was awfully generous when he didn't need

TRAFFIC
the wildlife trade monitoring network
www.facebook.com/traffics

WWF

Laporkan jenayah hidupan liar ke:
019.356.4194
 Hotline Hidupan Liar

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PESONA TUAH DAN PENAWAR AJAIB?

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ANDA AKAN MEMBANTU KAMI MENYELAMATKAN CICAK TOKEK?





ILLUSTRATIONS OF ANIMALS © BRENDAN WENZEL



Elizabeth John says you can't care about an animal until you know it.

his illustration. Pangolins are poached for medicinal purposes and as exotic meat. When it is frightened, it rolls up into a ball, which makes it easy to catch. This illustration tells its story in a humorous way," she says.

Wenzel is candid about how he captures the personalities of the animals. "I try to gather as much reference as I can. This includes photographs and other depictions like cave paintings or old tapestries. I feel they capture how people used to relate to a species," he says.

"Actually, when I sit down to depict

10 Picks

Brendan Wenzel's 10 illustrations of Malaysian wildlife featured in Traffic South East Asia's Posters are:

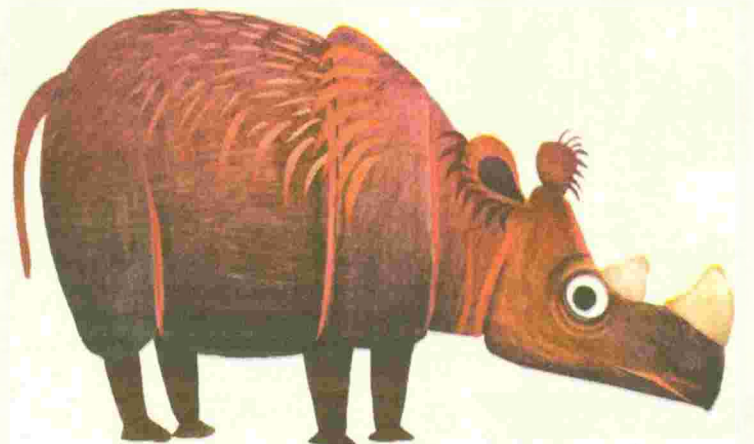
- Malayan Tiger
- Rhinoceros
- Sunda Pangolin
- Malayan Sun Bear
- Reticulated Python
- Malayan Porcupine
- Tokay Gecko
- Straw-headed Bulbul
- Argus Pheasant
- Sharks

the task of distributing the posters to schools through its Kelab Pencinta Alam programme. Each poster also carries the Wildlife Crime Hotline number that any reader can call to report poaching and illegal trading.

a creature, that is exactly what I try to imagine. I'm more curious about how I might have responded bumping into that animal in the forest 200 years ago. I wonder what feature would be locked in my memory before the animal slipped back into the undergrowth. What role would it play in my own story from there?"

REACHING OUT TO SCHOOLS

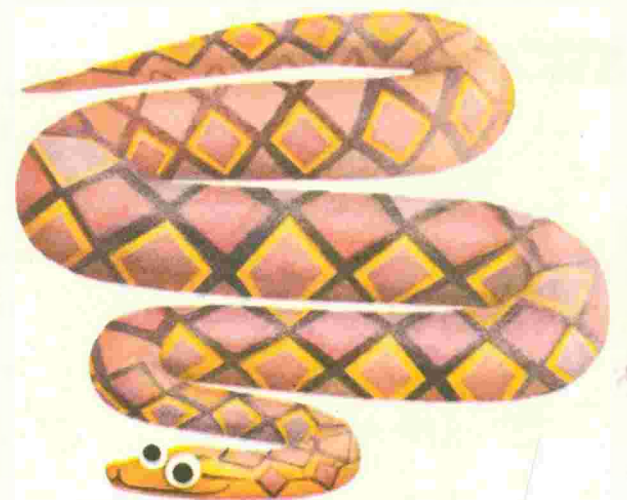
WWF-Malaysia funded the printing of 300 sets of these posters under a project to safeguard the Belum-Temengor Forest Complex. The Malaysian Nature Society undertook



"We'd love for every school to have a copy of the posters and to have an English version as well," says Elizabeth. "However, with our limited resources, we made a conscious decision to create the posters in Bahasa Malaysia only so that we could reach out to school children."

Next time your child shows you his drawings, you may want to take a cue from Wenzel and become excited, instead of worrying about accuracy.

That way, you will encourage him to learn more about wildlife. And, as Elizabeth says: "You can't care about an animal until you know it."



to be. He offered his illustrations to us without charge for use in educational materials."

Initially, his illustrations were used for an online campaign that Traffic South East Asia was running. "When it ended, we thought why waste these illustrations," explains Elizabeth. So, 10 were used to create different posters. Each carries the drawing of one animal, describes its unique feature, explains why it is in danger and ends with a call to help the animal. Also included is an explanatory note for teachers to use the posters in classroom settings.

What makes these illustrations special for Elizabeth is that Wenzel is able to show the character of the animal. "Look at the one of the pangolin. See the nervous look it has in