

"You Ever Shoot Auroras in Iceland?" and Other Things We Overheard at Cal Academy of Sciences's BigPicture

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By Adam L. Brinklow

Armed bodyguards surrounding an endangered white rhino in Kenya and the world's luckiest penguin narrowly escaping a stalking leopard seal are a few of the highlights of BigPicture, the California Academy of Science's first annual nature conservation photo exhibition, opening today. The pictures are pretty stunning, but so was the conversation at the VIP preview last night:

"There's a fruit bat rescue center in Australia where they put the baby bats in little swaddles, like you do for human babies. It's the cutest thing you've ever seen, baby bats swaddled up. There's an American bat rescue too, but they don't always need to swaddle. It's a fruit bat thing."

—Suzie Eszterhas, African savannah photographer, geeking out about bat conservation

"You ever shoot auroras in Iceland? There are no hotels, so you stay in people's barns, just barnhouse to barnhouse. It's their version of Airbnb. They offer your choice of two fish meals, Fish Meal A or Fish Meal B. Then you spend hours in a car parked on the tundra waiting for things to happen. Then on to the next barn."

—Josh Anon, former Pixar artist, on his award-winning northern lights photo

"This ibix had been chasing a group of females down that hill. Because you know ibixes—just thinking about sex all the time.

—Emanuele Biggi on his award-winning ibix photo

"Those are my materials: twist-ties, Ziploc bags, and a shitload of duct tape. The bag keeps dirt and rain off the camera. Most photographers use a pelican case to protect from bear jaws. But I haven't gotten one yet. Just bags."

—Morgan Heim on getting her award-winning mountain lion photo

"You've seen a lot of wave photos, but this wave has got personality. It's moody."

—Eszterhas

"I want to photograph those coyotes, but there's another photographer who's there all the time and she treats it like her turf. It gets confrontational. Like, 'Fancy camera, shame if something happened to it.' She's really defensive."

-Jaymie Heimbuch, urban wildlife photographer