

by Albert Earl Gilbert

About the Cover Painting

Some birding moments are indelibly etched in memory. The July 2011 cover painting of **Red-naped Trogons** (*Harpactes kasumba*) shows one of those moments—

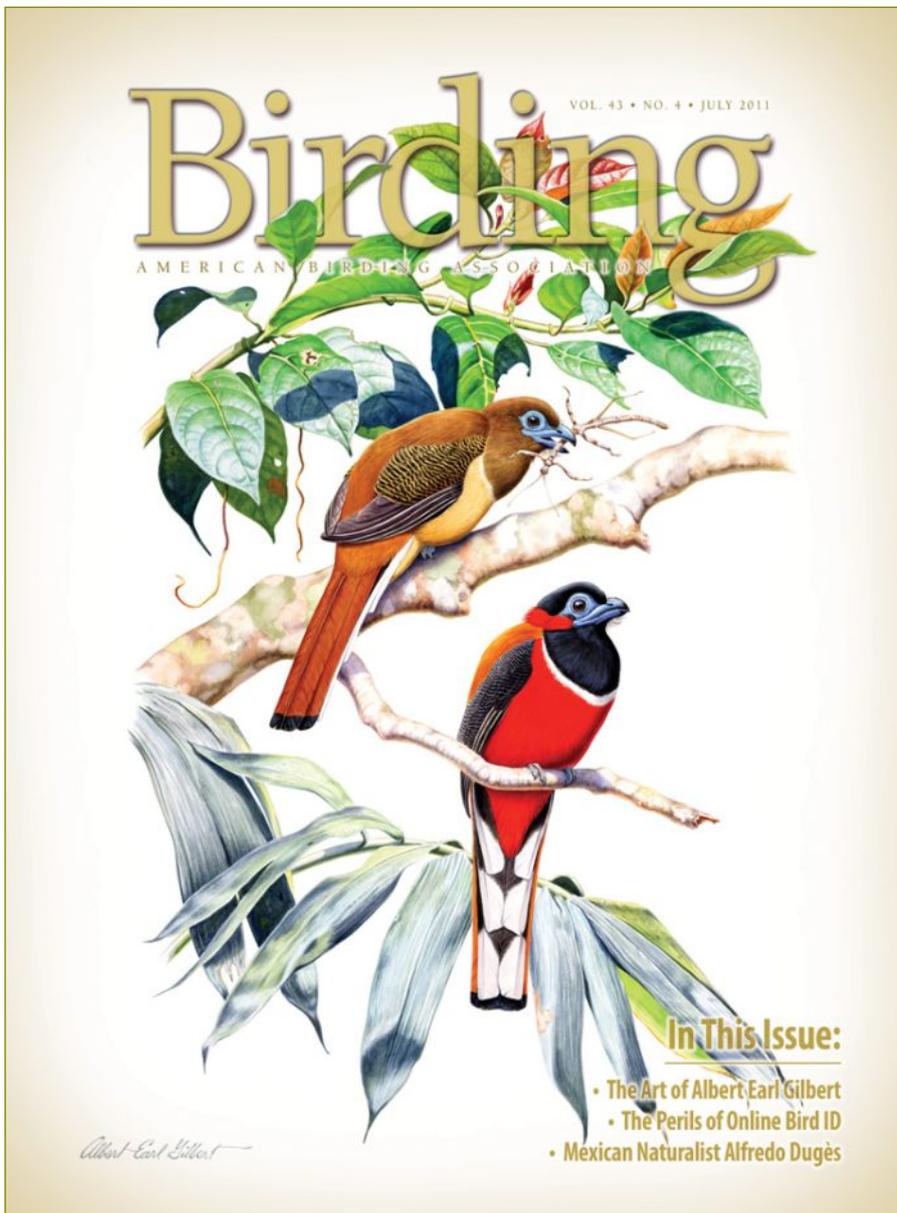
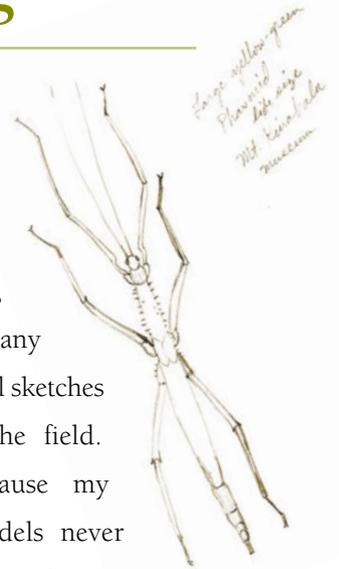
from my birding road trip of a lifetime in Southeast Asia.

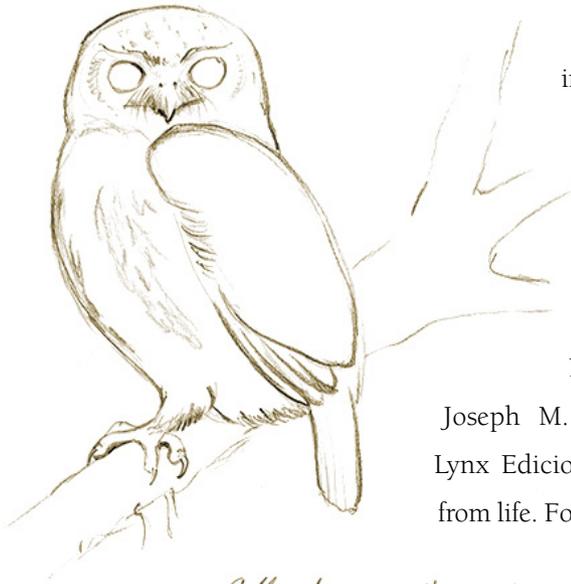
Instead of trying to photograph birds in the dark rainforests,

I made many quick pencil sketches while in the field. That's because my trogon models never remain in one place very long. They suddenly disappear by dropping backwards off a horizontal branch, then twist and glide away like a fast butterfly. Given their fluorescent red color, it is amazing how quickly they can vanish.

At Taman Negara, Malaysia's first national park, our fieldwork would begin at dawn. One morning, near the park campground, we spotted a tiny Black-thighed Falconet sitting like a flycatcher atop a dead branch. Then, much further on, we came upon the tracks of a small herd of Asian elephants. Wreathed Hornbills flew by noisily. Our guide, Dennis Yong, then led us to a pair of Red-naped Trogons, and I was able to sketch the birds through his scope.

The male swooped down, momen-





Collared
~~Little~~ Owllet thru scope
Mt Kinabalu
13 June 01

Glaucidium brodiei



Whitehead's
♀
Mt. Kinabalu

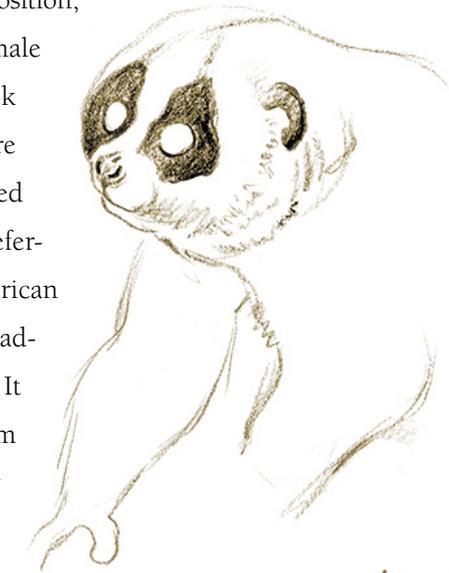
tarily disappeared, then returned with a medium-sized stick insect in his bill. He proceeded to eat it. The stick insect looked like a pretzel with legs! Some of these stick insects can be ten inches long and are a favorite food of trogons. While I sketched, a male Argus Pheasant called loudly nearby. I tried to absorb all the sights and sounds of an Asian rainforest and fix these impressions in memory.

Back home in my studio, I made the cover painting to illustrate Joseph M. Forshaw's book, *Trogons* (Princeton University Press and Lynx Edicions). My painting depicts a behavior that I sketched directly from life. For reasons of composition,

I showed a female with the stick insect. To ensure accuracy, I painted

plumage details with reference to bird specimens from the American Museum of Natural History and the Academy of Natural Sciences—Philadelphia. It may sound incredible, but I can beam myself back to the rainforest just by looking at my sketches and photos of jungle habitat. When I do that, I can still hear the Argus Pheasant and see the trogons—but strange to say, I forget about all the leeches and insects!

I especially like the layout and design of this *Birding* cover by the ABA's graphic designer Ed Rother. The intertwined vegetation and lettering creates a striking image!



Gilbert

Slow Loris

Kinabalu Center Borneo
June 2001



Learn more about the art of Albert Earl Gilbert online: AlbertEarlGilbert.com