



FROM LEFT: Borassus palm trees flourish in the northern Selous; Robert J. Ross focuses on the skull of a cape buffalo.



THE UNINHABITED SELOUS IS A TREASURE TROVE OF BIODIVERSITY.

one to watch

Game Show

A local photographer produces a stunning visual journey of one of Africa's largest protected areas. **BY DEXTER CIRILLO**

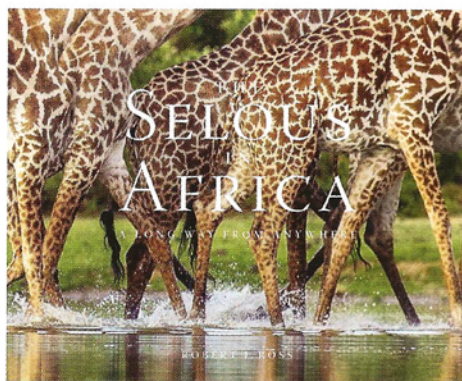
PART-TIME BASALT RESIDENT ROBERT J. ROSS has two passions—Africa and photography—and he developed one of them in an unlikely place. “I fell in love with Africa as a child,” says the native New Yorker. “My grandparents lived near the Bronx Zoo, and I visited the animals a lot.”

That early affinity for far-flung fauna, and Ross’s ensuing skill behind the lens, define *The Selous in Africa: A Long Way from Anywhere* (\$65), an extraordinary new photographic book of Tanzania’s Selous Game Reserve, one of the largest remaining wilderness areas in Africa. A UNESCO World Heritage site since 1982, the uninhabited Selous is a treasure trove of biodiversity that Ross documents in close to 400 images.

Between his junior and senior years of high school, in 1973, Ross convinced his parents to let him go to Kenya and Tanzania with Outward Bound, where he climbed Mount Kilimanjaro and learned firsthand about wildlife conservation. Concurrently, his

mother moved to Aspen, which became home base for Ross.

With degrees from Middlebury College and Columbia University and a successful career in property finance and development, Ross returned to Africa many times as a photojournalist and business consultant, eventually becoming a part-time resident of Cape Town and turning photography into a full-time vocation.



He first visited the Selous in 2009 on assignment. Overwhelmed by its vastness—the Selous is larger than Vermont and New Hampshire combined—Ross fell in love again and embarked on a six-year project that would become the book, logging some 350 days in the field and taking 100,000 photographs—some while hovering precariously in an open-air microlight plane.

By serendipity, Ross’s neighbor in Southampton, Long Island—his home at the time—was the late Peter Matthiessen, who had published *Sand Rivers*, about his safari to the Selous, in 1981. Ross persuaded Matthiessen to look at his images. “He was thrilled that I wasn’t photographing just the large game animals, but also the birds and exotic insects and smaller creatures,” he says. “His wife, Maria, had grown up in Tanzania. She helped edit the book. Peter gave me permission to use quotes from *Sand Rivers* in [it].”

With the book, Ross hopes to raise international awareness of the Selous, which is threatened, in part, by mining, oil and gas extraction, and poaching. (The latter put the reserve on the World Heritage Committee’s danger list in 2014.) Indeed, the breadth and beauty of his photos are a testament to why this natural treasure is worth preserving. ●