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PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAUL STAROSTA

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Since they're round, fragile, and hard to handle, eggs are seldom placed before the general public for its delight. And that's a pity because the details in their patterns reveal unsuspected beauty. Found on pure, smooth curves, these often tiny markings combine arabesques, dots, patches, shadows, and even scumble, to an often satisfying effect. The shades are subtle and often semi-transparent. Never have chance and necessity been combined with such inventiveness and power as on what can only be described as these masterpieces on shell, whether matt or gloss, porous or smooth.

For behind the emotion lurk questions: Why these colours? Why these shapes? For instance, why do guillemots lay such pointed eggs, in such highly variable patterns and colours, while owl eggs are virtually spherical and perfectly white? Why are tinamou eggs as smooth and shiny as porcelain? Why are a warbler's eggs red, an emu's almost black, and a hedge sparrow's turquoise? Why does a kiwi lay an egg that weighs almost one-third of its own weight? The largest egg in the world weighed 9 kilos. Is there a limit to an egg's size?

Faced with the challenge of depicting these perfect objects that require equally perfect lighting, the photographer Paul Starosta wallowed among the thirty thousand eggs in the Werner Haller Collection in the Natural History Museum of Geneva to learn the secret. This book contains the results of his encounters with the world's most achingly beautiful eggs.

Paul Starosta is a biologist and photographer. Combining his two passions—nature and photography—he has published over forty award-winning books on plants and animals, for which he has received numerous awards. Issue 129 (2010) of *Photo Poche*, the world-famous series of photography monographs created by Robert Delpire and published by Actes Sud, was dedicated entirely to him. 5 Continents Editions published Paul Starosta's *Graines* in 2016.

Laurent Vallotton was born in 1969 and studied biology at the University of Lausanne, graduating in 1993. He first became interested in the environment during his childhood in Brazil, but he developed a special passion for birds following his encounter with the ornithologist Lionel Maumary. Together, they have worked on various ornithological projects, foremost of which were the building of a birdwatching station in the Alps in 1991 to follow bird migrations, the creation of a bird island in Lake Geneva in 2002, and the publication of the Bible of Swiss ornithology, *Les Oiseaux de Suisse*, in 2007. Vallotton has been scientific consultant at the Museum of Natural History in Geneva since 2003, organizing several exhibitions.