

## REMOTE WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY TRIPS IN AFRICA

Part 1 of a 3 Part Series

### Tailor-made Logistics

By Johan J Botha MPSSA, EFIAP, EPSSA, ARPS, SPSA  
and  
Margie Botha FPSSA, AFIAP  
South Africa  
www.johanjbotha.com



Lioness with cubs chasing intruding male away (Central Kalahari, Botswana)

**M**y wife, Margie, and I always travel together on our photography trips. Both of us are keen and serious wildlife photographers, a hobby that started 35 years ago. We have photographed all over the world, but Africa, with its rich and diversified wildlife and wonderful parks is our home and our first love. We try to be somewhere in the bush for at least six weeks every year.

This article describes how we have selected the locations and personalized the logistical support that underpins our cherished photographic bush excursions.

### A Patient Pursuit

The photographic challenge for me is to try to capture our wildlife experiences and subjects in an extraordinary and unique manner to a world class standard. This requires a lot of time and patience in the bush.

For example, on one occasion our time was spent with a cheetah mother and her two very young cubs for a whole month. We left camp every morning on a search to find them, beginning with our anticipation of their most likely location. She killed seven times during this period and, apart from the numerous excellent photo opportunities, it was fascinating to witness her way of operation, of teaching the two young cubs when to stay, when to join her, what to do with the prey.

Following this month-long expedition, we returned six weeks later to check on the cubs' progress in the wild and then again after one year, photographing the two sub-adult cubs assisting their mom with the hunt.



Cheetah mother and cubs that we followed for a month and eventually a year (Kgalagadi, Botswana)

Essentially then, our personal desires for wildlife photography are:

- To visit remote and far away wildlife parks and places.
- To find the sought-after subject matter.
- To stay with it continuously for days in anticipation of unique and extraordinary action and images.
- To study their behaviour in order to be able to better "predict" what was going to happen next and to photograph it.

### Where do we photograph in Africa?

Our particular needs, as listed above, are not well suited to the mainstream tourist game-parks because of the busy traffic, the self-drive limitations and the cost of extended accommodation.

The solution, therefore, is the parks in the more remote and harsher environments where the visitors are required to be self-contained at a campsite. This situation effectively guarantees less people and better opportunities to get unique and different photographic opportunities.

There are only a few such remote parks in South Africa, but there are also some in Botswana, Zimbabwe and Namibia. Our favourite destinations include Khutsi National Park, the Central Kalahari Game Reserve, Moremi and Chobe National Parks in Botswana, Etosha National Park in Namibia, and the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park in South Africa on the Botswana side.



Two Leopard cubs that we waited for 8 days/8 hours every day to appear outside their den in good light (Botswana)

### Vehicle Options

There are many excellent parks and lodges in Africa that offer typical open, game-viewing vehicles for wildlife viewing and photography, geared for the tourist and holiday trade where the people on the vehicle have very different goals to ours. They normally want to see as much variety as possible, so they do not want to stay in one place for an extended period. Also, the vehicles do not have space or facilities for more than one camera system per individual and most of the vehicles have no proper support systems for long telephoto lenses. Furthermore, the images obtained will not be unique, since all the other photographers on the vehicle have the same opportunities at the same time.



Typical open safari vehicle with photographers



The only real solution was to have our own vehicle dedicated to the two of us for our wildlife photography and camping requirements. We need a strong 4x4 vehicle to enable driving on sandy and rough, very corrugated gravel roads as well as very wet conditions and sometimes river crossings. The make of vehicle was chosen with due consideration to the availability of spare parts and service in remote areas if required. We always had Toyota vehicles for more than 35 years except for one Landrover and are currently driving a Toyota Landcruiser.



We have travelled along some excellent roads, especially in Namibia, but some main roads and most secondary roads are challenging (potholes, sand, rocks, water)



Heavy sandy road



A typical two track road



Typical bush bridges (Botswana)



We are crossing a river between Kwai and Savuti in Botswana



Crossing a river when towing a caravan can be dangerous if you get stuck in the mud. You must therefore be very sure that you will be able to get through by walking the planned path through the water first

### Equipping the vehicle

Off-road tyres with strong side walls are a must and so is a good 12V compressor to inflate the tires, high lift jack and tyre repair kit. Our vehicle is also equipped with a built-in additional fuel tank (total capacity= 150 litres). An extra deep-cycle 12 V battery system that can also be charged with solar is essential to power the rugged and proven 60 litre deep freezer which contains our frozen food supply (cooked and uncooked) to last for up to 6 weeks. The roof rack is used for additional packing space like our complete second spare wheel, recovery equipment and additional fuel and water in special containers. A very good GPS with pre-loaded software showing the off-road bush tracks and signposts is essential to find your way without problems.

Margie is seated behind me in the vehicle for obvious reasons. Dedicated, commercially available camera supporting systems are attached to the driver's door and passenger door behind the driver. All my camera equipment is on the passenger seat next to me. Margie's camera stuff is on the empty seat next her. We cover the equipment to keep the dust out but have to be able to retrieve it quickly to mount it on support systems when needed.



The roof rack is essential, but should not be overloaded as it will make the vehicle top heavy



Close-up of the commercially available door mounted camera support systems attached to the Landcruiser (Etosha, Namibia)

### Accommodation

As discussed above, the only cost-effective way to stay for extended periods, and with the necessary freedom in the parks, is to camp. In former times we camped in the wild bush but nowadays mainly at designated very basic and rustic campsites. Camping in these remote destinations normally implies 100% self-sufficiency with regards to food, water, fuel, energy (batteries charged with solar) and shelter against the environment as well as ablution needs. There are also no fences, so the necessary enclosure and containment precautions against the wild animals (predators and stealing baboons, monkeys, badgers, hyenas, etc) are critical. You have to keep everything locked up to keep the thieves away!

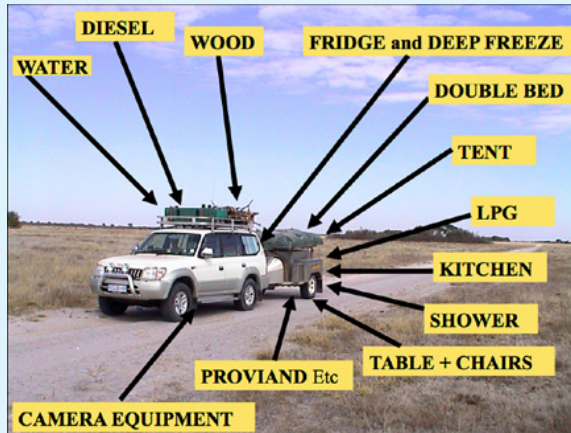
As youngsters, we started off with a ground tent, but we changed very quickly to a 4 x 4 trailer. This enabled us to carry all the essential kit plus additional water and fuel but especially also provided for sleeping quite high above the ground. We never operated or owned a roof top tent or motorhome because that would necessitate packing everything up every day before you go out photographing. Anyhow, we needed a base camp as we stay for extended periods (minimum 7 days at a place). Nowadays (at age 70) we are using an off-road caravan as it requires less effort to set-up and pack-up camp and it also provides luxuries like a proper mattress, hot shower, gas cooking stove and fridge, etc.







The off-road trailer allowed us to sleep higher above the ground



The off-road trailer allowed us to sleep higher above the ground

**Planning and Packing**

Proper planning of our long trips is very important and detailed. We want to travel as light as possible, sleep as convenient as possible, eat as tasty as possible and enjoy every minute as much as possible. "Keep it simple" is our overarching principle. We know that we must NEVER run out of fresh water or fuel. A long trip through the Central Kalahari on one occasion meant only 5 litres of water per person per day, which included drinking, and shower/washing needs. Another frequent long stay at Polentswa in the Kgalagadi in Botswana meant the nearest people were 60 km away and



Our off-road caravan that we use today



Our off-road caravan that we use today

the nearest doctor was 450 km away in Upington with about 50% of the route gravel or sand. All sensible precautions are taken to avoid getting injured or sick or bitten, for example by a snake, in this desert area. It is important to take sufficient basic and chronic medication.

Margie supervising me filling our containers with utility water from the communal well negotiated with the locals. All drinking water has to be brought from home or bought at the nearest big town. We also buy bread from the locals (Botswana).



**Clothing and ablution**

We do not take much clothing due to space limitations ... about three to four changes. For summer it means a few T-shirts and shorts and always a warm jacket. We wash clothes almost every day. For winter warm tracksuit pants or long pants are needed as well.

Some of the remote camps have a very basic outside cold shower and a long drop toilet. To have water is a luxury! If not available, we have to take all our water along in the vehicle and caravan in plastic containers. The shower water is also used to do the washing of our clothes. Usually, the campsite water in the bush (if available) is not safe for human consumption, so we always take water along for cooking and drinking.



Image of enclosures of long drop toilet on right and cold water bush shower on left (Botswana)



An A-frame as found at most dedicated campsites in Botswana as artificial shade





Margie washing clothes at a designated campsite with very salty water (Rooiputs, Botswana)



Two naughty lions visited at night and inspected the same basin that Margie was using

**Food**

While in the bush, we do most of our cooking on an open fire or a gas top. We have to plan well due to the limited space in our freezer, especially if we go away for long periods of time. On most days we get back to camp at the latest possible time, so the evenings tend to be short. For this reason, we also take along pre-cooked meals like stew, oxtail, mince or chicken pies as well as some cooked vegetables. We always make a fire to keep the wild animals away, so it is easy to also warm the food on the fire, while cooking some rice or potato etc. to add to the meal. Alternatively, a simple barbeque is a frequent favourite. We stock a few cans of tinned food in the cupboard and there is always something sweet tucked in there. For breakfast we will have coffee and rusks and for lunch a sandwich with cheese or ham and biscuits. We take a lot of fresh vegetables and salads for the first two or three weeks and try stock up on fresh food and bread, wherever possible. (See also a comment regarding fruit under the Communication and Safety heading.)



Margie supervising my bush fire cooking (Zambia)

**Waste**

All waste needs to be taken out of remote camping places.

**Communication and Safety**

We usually do our travelling and camping on our own in areas where there are no mobile or wifi networks. We therefore take a satellite phone for absolute emergency and essential communication. Our travel philosophy is to take minimal risks. For example, we'd rather do time-consuming detours when a river crossing seems to be too risky or a road too rocky or muddy. We learned this lesson after having seven punctured tyres on a two-month trip through Namibia and Botswana. Undertaking these repairs without any assistance was quite a challenge.

It is very important to avoid having strong smelling fruit like oranges and apples that attract animals like elephants and baboons as they will break in and destroy your stuff to get to it...(it happened to us!).



Flat tyre number 7. I had to repair all punctured tyres, with only Margie's assistance, on a two month Namibia & Botswana trip



Deflating the tyres to a third or more of the normal pressure is a huge assistance for sand driving but makes the tyre side walls much more prone to punctures (Namibia)

Predators like lions and leopards need to be watched, especially at night. We are very cautious after a couple of incidents. Critical precautions against predators include a large fire at night and good, motion sensor sensitive LED lighting while we prepare food outside. We will also never be more than a few metres away from our caravan or vehicle. The vehicles always cover our backsides.

Locals or poachers are not that many in the remote areas and we have never encountered any problems with them.



Stuck in sand (Botswana)



Our movement trip camera caught this lion in action when it stole our gas bottle at night...to only leave it in the veld (field) 200 metres away (Kgalagadi, Botswana)

**Conclusion**

The travelling, camping and bush living is an enchanting adventure and we thoroughly enjoy it. But, in the bigger picture, it is primarily just a means to get really close to the wildlife for extended time periods to enable us to get unique experiences and images of animals in their natural habitat.

The "how" of the wildlife photography is a subject for a follow-up article.



## REMOTE WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY TRIPS IN AFRICA

Part 2 of a 3 Part Series

### Wildlife Photography My Way... Musts

By Johan J Botha MPSSA, EFIAP, EPSSA, ARPS, SPSSA  
South Africa  
[www.johanjbotha.com](http://www.johanjbotha.com)

Wildlife photography has become very popular and there are many excellent and successful wildlife photographers throughout the world. Each has their own unique way to produce their best results. After many years of enjoying this hobby, I have developed my own particular way of doing wildlife photography which I will describe across parts two and three of this series of articles. I will include my thoughts on the most important Musts and Myths, and I will also share some Maybe ideas which I have used to enhance and add interest to my photographs. This article will deal with some "Musts" in my view.

#### Successful Wildlife Photography

Successful wildlife photography means different things to different photographers. For some it is to capture an image of an animal or wildlife on their mobile phone as a memory for themselves or to share with friends or family or on social media. For others it is to get images good enough to enter salons or participate at club level. Some enjoy making a photo album of a safari trip or to capture a photo of a long sought-after species. For others it means images that will sell to earn some money.

As I said in Part 1 of this 3-part series, the photographic challenge for me is to try to capture wildlife subjects and their behaviour in an extraordinary and unique manner to a world class standard. This goal requires a lot of time and lots of patience in the bush.



This image was awarded in Natures Best Magazine international wildlife competition and exhibited in the Smithsonian Natural History Museum in Washington DC with 6.5 million visitors per year (Etosha, Namibia)



This scene, where the black rhino was visible through the legs of an elephant, was different for me. The image was used and published by The African Wildlife Foundation (Etosha, Namibia)

In my view, to capture that special, stunning image, you need two major ingredients. The first is a **decisive moment** or action by the subject(s) and the second is an **able** photographer to capture it quickly. And a bit of luck is always a very welcome third ingredient!

To summarize, the critical steps for my wildlife photography to be successful are:

- To find the sought-after wildlife subject matter.
- To stay with it continuously, going back for days in anticipation of that unique image
- To know and "read" the behaviour in order to be able to "predict" what is going to happen next.
- To photograph it competently and with practiced skill.

So what in my view are the Musts?

#### Ethics

The most important rules for all wildlife photographers that I need to emphasise are:

1. The wildlife subject is always more important than the images – respect it.
2. Obey all the park rules, eg stay on the road, for safety reasons do not at all get out of your vehicle except at designated places or in an emergency, never feed or disturb the animals, etc.
3. Respect other people and photographers in your efforts to get an image.

#### Calibration

You must reflect true colours with wildlife images and footage. You can get away with colour variations in photojournalism or pictorial images but not with wildlife images. It is therefore essential to calibrate and/or select the correct colour profiles on your input/capturing hardware - (camera), processing – (computer, tablet etc) and final output (projector, tv, computer) equipment to ensure that faithful detail is preserved, and the true colours are retained right through the capture-to-view value chain. There are various products available to calibrate your equipment. I use the Spyder from Datacolour to calibrate my computer screens, projector and a large screen Samsung 4K QLED TV (75") that I only use for viewing purposes with an audience. You must switch all the auto options off and select RGB when calibrating a TV with a Spyder for wildlife image viewing purposes.

#### Animal Behaviour

You must spend time getting to know and learning to read animal behaviour to be able to anticipate and predict events. For example....

- Study animal tracks... which animal is it .. how old are the tracks... where is it heading... water or den... which animal was there first?
- Wait patiently at a waterhole or a den or near a nest but be ready for action all the time



This image of an elephant track and hyena spoor on top of it tells a story (Savuti, Botswana)



- Think like an animal! Keep in mind that no energy is wasted unnecessarily by wild animals. They will always follow the path of least resistance to preserve energy. They will, for example, rather follow a foot path than walk through rough and tall vegetation or walk around a rock rather than climbing over it.
- You must know who the boss or the leader is. Studying its behaviour will assist with predictions of what is going to happen next and assist you to position yourself and get the correct lens and camera ready.
- Study the wind direction. It is critical for stalking predators and also for sitting birds that are ready to take-off. Predators will almost always attempt to stalk their prey from a downwind direction so that the prey cannot smell the predator. In other words when you are in a "predator area" search for them downwind of potential prey. Birds on a perch will normally take-off and land upwind like aircraft. In strong wind they will be lifted higher than the perch when taking off and in little or no wind they will drop down lower than the perch. Obviously, with no wind the direction is unpredictable.
- Birds will almost always give a sign that they are going to take-off like changing posture, shaking feathers or defecating.



Goshawk shaking feathers before take-off (Kgalagadi, Botswana)



Bee-eater on perch with butterfly for the chicks in the nest (Karongo, South Africa)

- Goshawks on the ground may indicate the presence of a snake or badger that is on the move by catching disturbed insects or other small prey in its wake.
- Bee-eaters fly in a circuit to catch butterflies and other insects and will return normally to the same perch time and again. Wait for them and be ready at the perch.
- You must learn to recognise and understand why animals have these tell-tale behavioural actions.

## Purpose

You must do something with your images! It gives purpose to your photographic trips, equipment and capture methodology whether it is for social media, salons, competitions, books or Audio-Visual shows etc. It is also a must to use your very best images for these purposes as you never get a second chance to make first impressions.

## Equipment

It is not so important which and what photo capturing equipment you have, but it is a must to know it inside out. Photographers are willing to spend big amounts of money on equipment



(and safaris) but are usually very reluctant to read their manuals, to go on training courses or most important to practice before every trip with their equipment. If you can't change settings quickly and know the impact of every setting to get the desired effect, then you will become a trigger (shutter) happy person with a very low successful capture percentage with your only hope being lucky shots. **You need to be photographically fit** for successful wildlife photography.

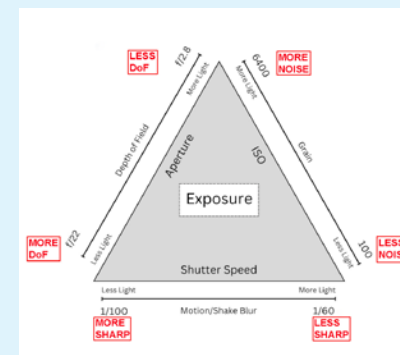
I started off with Minolta in the late 80's, moved to Canon and later Nikon (sponsored) and have been using Sony mirrorless bodies and lenses for the past three years. I practice even today how to change settings quickly in the dark.

## Raw Format

It is a must to shoot in the Raw format if you are a serious wildlife photographer. Apart from a large data file, processing adjustments like white balance, exposure, sharpening and noise removal etc to reproduce the original scene can be done best in this format. Moderate cropping (20 - 30%) and a copy of the original Raw file is becoming the norm in most competitions if you are a finalist. It is always better to capture the image in the correct frame/file size by moving your vehicle or using a different lens than attempting to enlarge (crop) a tiny part of an image to be full frame with processing.

## The Exposure Triangle

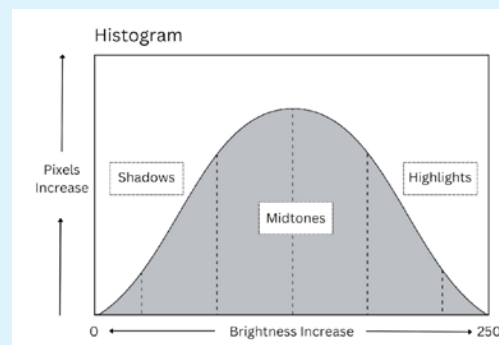
You must understand the triangular relationship and resulting effects of change of any one between shutter speed (Tv or s), lens opening or aperture (f) and ISO. This is the most basic but also the most important foundation of photography. Equally important are the effect of different lenses (eg short telephoto vs long telephoto) and camera bodies (eg full frame sensor vs crop sensor) on these parameters and the results in the view finder.



Exposure triangle

## Histogram

The histogram and zebra settings are your friends to expose correctly and especially not to blow the whites (permanent loss of details in the white). Use both instead of trusting the image review as an exposure guide.



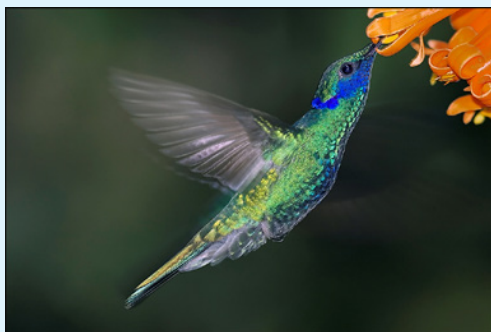
Exposure histogram which should not be clipped on the dark (left) or light (right) side. Clipping means no recoverable data or detail in the image



**Composition**

The composition of an image must always be strong, no matter how good the story is. Composition adds to impact and the old rule of thirds still applies in many cases.

The L-line on thirds makes the composition of the three lions very strong



A diagonal line from left bottom to top right confirms the western reading direction and adds to impact

**Post Capture Processing**

Processing must be done to develop the raw image to reflect the original scene. Process however as little as possible and only as per the rules of the competition. It is nowadays very easy to cheat with all the different software available, but you will be caught out when the raw image is compared to the submitted image by the judges. I use Adobe's Photoshop for post capture processing but many of my friends prefer Lightroom.



**Different**

Your images must be different to make lasting impressions. Many people around the globe photograph wildlife and many substantially similar images are seen. The trick is to capture the same subject in a different manner or find something beyond the familiar to capture.

The three drinking zebra and one giraffe is very different (Etosha, Namibia)



The image of the lion in a tree using the V as a head support is uncommon (Serengeti, Tanzania)



It is difficult and uncommon to photograph a bird flying directly towards you like this spoonbill landing (Pilanesberg, South Africa)



The black and white image of a wildebeest kicking up sand is different (Kgalagadi, Botswana)



Meerkats arranged from small to tall like organ pipes has only ever happened to me once (Makgadikgadi Botswana)

Part 3 of this three article series, in the next issue of FIAP news, will deal with the Myths of wildlife photography and I will also share some Maybe ideas which I have used to enhance and add interest to my photographs.





# Remote Wildlife Photography Trips In Africa

Part 3 of a 3 Part Series

## Wildlife Photography My Way... Myths and Maybe

By Johan J Botha MPSSA, EFIAP, EPSSA, ARPS, SPSA  
South Africa

[www.johanjbotha.com](http://www.johanjbotha.com)

**T**his article is the final part of a three part series that commenced in the February 2023 Edition of FIAP News. It is recommended that you read the article series in sequence. Part 2 of this 3 part series, in the May 2023 issue of FIAP News, covered some "Musts" of wildlife photography in my view. In this article, I will deal with the Myths of wildlife photography and I will also share some "Maybe" ideas which I have used to enhance and add interest to my photographs.

### MYTHS

#### Camera & Lens

One of the biggest myths in photography is that cameras and lenses take images. They can't... the human using them takes the images. There is no need to always get the latest equipment. Be creative and productive with what you have by studying and understanding it. It is just a means to a purpose. The same applies to AV software and programmes.



Two young male lions in strong wind without sun (Kgalagadi, Botswana)

#### Time of day

It is also a huge myth that images taken in the middle of the day or without sunlight cannot work. If you create impact = no problem! I enjoy going out to photograph in bad weather. Sometimes photos with a thunderstorm in the background with those blue blue skies or taken while the rain is pouring down, can be quite different.



Lion couple with him whispering in her ear in the middle of the day but the mood is created by the strong wind (Etosha, Namibia)





### See the Eyes

It is also a myth that you must always see the eyes in wildlife images and that you should not photograph animals walking away from you.

Two male lions walking away from me in a sandstorm (Kgalagadi, Botswana)

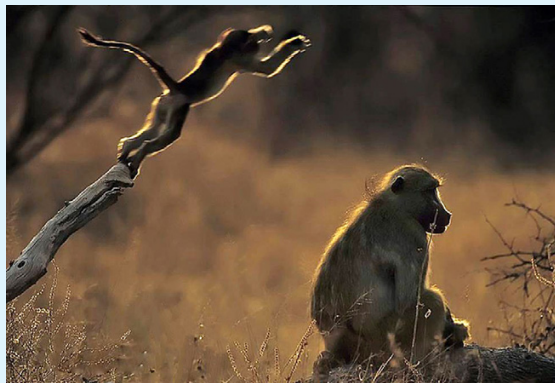


### Two subjects

You also hear from traditionalists that two subjects compete. That is a myth – It can create an unseen bond like an action between them or if one is at a different depth of field (DoF).



Lechwe flying through water to get closer to an out of focus female (Moremi, Botswana)



Baby baboon on the verge of jumping onto the back of the unsuspecting mother (Hwange, Zimbabwe)



### ISO > 1000

Too much grain at ISO values above 1000 is another holy grail that is a complete myth. The time of the day and noise removal software easily allows capturing with ISO values in the thousands.



Cape fox pup begging its parent for food was taken at ISO 6400 (Kgalagadi, South Africa). This image did well in competitions despite the high capture ISO

### Subject / space ratio

The trend nowadays is to leave more space around subjects to show the environment compared to former era norms where filling the frame with the subject was the norm.



Black-backed Jackal pup peeping out of the den in the ground in the middle of a pan (Kgalagadi, South Africa)

### Focus

It is also not true that everything of a subject must be sharp...it depends on the impact.

Bathing oriole with only the beak and eye area sharp (Zimanga, South Africa)





Just as untrue is the statement that the background must always be out of focus to emphasize the subject. It depends again on the impact.

Hyena stealing the kill of African wild dog with the background not out of focus because of the short lens that I used (Savuti, Botswana)

## MAYBE

I have a number of preferences and ways of doing things that suit my personal style of photography. I mention them for your consideration under the heading "Maybe" because maybe some of them might suit you too.

### Equipment next to me

I always have two camera bodies, as well as one long telephoto lens (600 mm) and one zoom lens (200 – 600 mm) with me on a wildlife trip. The bodies are fixed as far as possible for the entire trip to the lenses for dust and simplicity purposes and will only sometimes (seldom) be removed to fit a 1.4x times converter. Ninety percent plus of the images are shot with the long lens as I firmly believe that a lens can never be too long for wildlife photography. I physically move backwards rather than zooming out or changing lenses to get the subject in the frame, as I also prefer the backgrounds of wide-open telephoto (f4) lenses.

At least two fully charged spare camera batteries and a 12V battery charger in the vehicle to enable me to immediately recharge flat batteries are essential. You never know when you will stay for hours on end at a scene and that is why I also have several large capacity storage cards on hand. I described the essential camera support system in the first article of this series, located in the February 2023 edition. A raincoat for the camera and lenses is also very handy for shooting in strong winds, dust and rain.

### Camera settings

I shoot in aperture control (Av) mode in order to control the depth of field (DoF) on the subject and the background for different results and impact. It is however very important to remember at the scene that DoF is influenced by four factors and not only three as generally believed, i.e. aperture size (f number), focal length of lens (the longer the lens the shallower the DoF), distance from subject (the closer to the subject the shallower the DoF) and camera sensor size (full frame sensor vs crop sensor). See this link for a diagram of the four factors impacting on the depth of field <https://www.slrlounge.com/aperture-guide-pt2-shallow-and-deep-depth-of-field/>

My ISO setting is at auto but with a maximum of 12,500 in daylight. I will always manipulate the shutter speed and aperture to obtain the lowest ISO possible in early mornings and late

afternoons during the golden hours to minimise grain/digital noise. High ISO is not a problem under bright light conditions. I must admit however that I would rather capture a grainy image at much higher ISO values than return with no image! See this link for a diagram of ISO variables <https://za.pinterest.com/pin/501447739764316265/>

My shutter speed will depend on the effect that I want to create and may vary from 1/60 second for panning to 1/8000 for fast birds in flight and may also vary depending on the influence on the auto ISO. A general guideline for minimum shutter speed is the inverse of the focal length when the lens is on a support system. For example, the minimum shutter speed for a 400 mm lens on a support system will therefore be 1/400 s and for an 80 mm lens one eightieth of a second. Multiply the speed by three when handheld.

My autofocus settings will vary between single point and wide depending on the situation. I thoroughly enjoy the almost full sensor coverage of autofocus points on mirrorless cameras compared to only the middle or centre area for DSLR cameras.

An aircraft pilot monitors airspeed, height and direction continuously when flying in their plane. A clever wildlife photographer similarly continuously monitors shutter speed, aperture, ISO and autofocus settings in their view finder.

### Capture methodology

I shoot many images in very short bursts (max 10 frames a burst) when decisive moments happen. With modern cameras you can shoot up to 30 frames per second which makes post capture sorting a burden rather than a pleasure. It is also my way to shoot many images at a winning (unique) scene, but I will eventually only use 1 or 2 images of the scene as repetitive or substantially similar images never do well in competitions following the impact of the first one.

### Popular subjects

I regard elephant, rhino, zebra, lion, giraffe, wildebeest, springbuck, jackal etc as popular subjects with millions of pictures available. You must photograph them very differently to obtain extra-ordinary or unique images



Two lions playing in the road with one standing upright (Kgalagadi, Botswana)





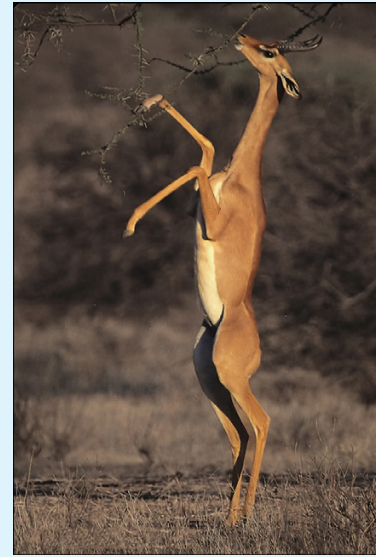
Elephant and lion confrontation (Etosha, Namibia)



Young male lion staring through grass (Kgalagadi, Botswana)



Male lions wrestling (Kgalagadi, Botswana)



Less popular subjects

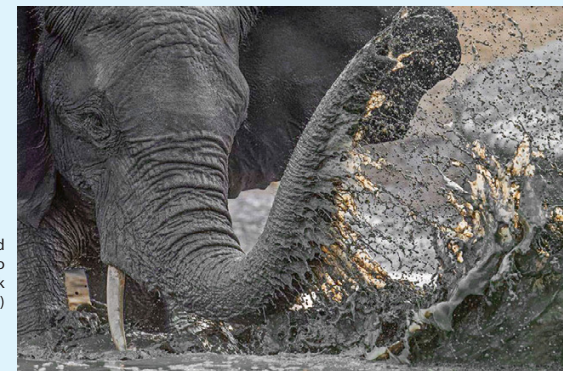
Less popular subjects should however also be photographed differently to have impact.

Gerenuke standing on hind legs (Kenya)



These little birds are very difficult to capture in focus in flight (Kgalagadi, Botswana)

Capture tight or from a low angle (eye level)



Elephant splashing mud taken with a 600 mm lens to emphasize the head and trunk (Savuti, Botswana)

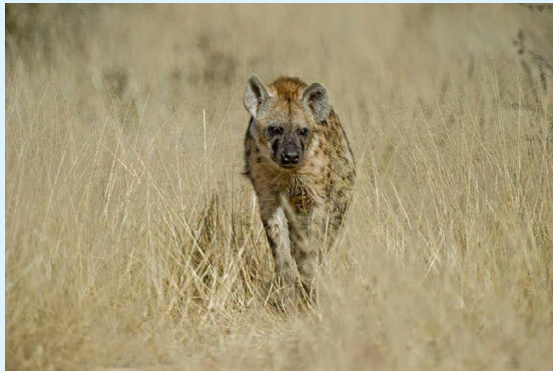






Chameleon walking in the road captured with 600 mm lens whilst lying on my belly (Hwange, Zimbabwe)

**Compose differently from normal club requirements**



Hyena appearing from the savannah composed in the middle of the image and not on a third as normally encouraged by clubs (Kgalagadi, Botswana)

**Human intervention**

Avoid man made subjects as it normally does not work except where it contributes to the story telling value and impact.



The lion cub is sitting on a distracting and unnatural concrete block that is protecting the water pump (Kgalagadi, Botswana)



A spotlight can work to add to impact.

Leopard after sunset with spotlight assistance (Nkorho, Sabi Sands)

**Vertical images need higher impact than horizontal images to do well**

The wide screen proportions of modern high definition (HD) screens, for example 16 x 9, make vertical images look small with distracting large empty spaces on the sides of the vertical picture. Horizontal images, in contrast, fill the whole screen with immediate higher impact.



Two elephants measuring – up (Chobe, Botswana)

**Different species in an image add to impact**



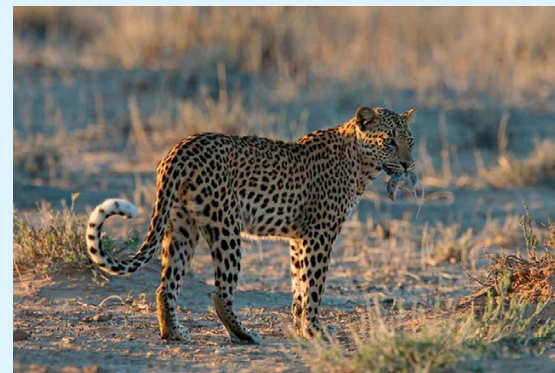
Elephant surrounded by zebras (Kumaga, Botswana)





### Tell a story with a series of images

People love visual stories but limit the number of images as they can easily get bored.



The cape fox parent brought a rat to the pups at the den and gave it to one of them. The pup played with it but all of a sudden the fox family, just in time, escaped an unnoticed leopard attack that luckily only got the rat as it's prize (Kgalagadi, South Africa)

### Never leave an opportunity for something unknown

The old proverb "The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence" explains why you often see people racing from one scene to other potential scenes in the (uncertain) hope that they will see something there that is more exciting. I subscribe to the proverb that "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush". It is very important to me to never leave an opportunity that I have in front of me that may develop into something unique if I am simply patient.



## CONCLUSION

A proficient wildlife photographer has an in-depth practical knowledge of their equipment. Operating with depth of field, ISO, shutter speed and focus systems are natural reactions. They have developed the innate ability to read the scene, study the subject and environmental conditions AND to apply it quickly when the heat is on. By its very description, a decisive moment only lasts a moment!

My special love is the extra-ordinary or unique image. Such images are the differentiators that stand a chance of winning or getting awarded in major international photo competitions or getting published. It is important to me to rate my development and progress by submitting my photographs for this kind of peer review. I talk here for example of the WPoTY (The Natural History Museum Wildlife Photographer of the Year) annual, international wildlife photography competition in London in the UK with more than 38,000 entries. Only around 100 images are selected for exhibition from photographers from 90+ countries and it is profoundly rewarding to have one's efforts endorsed in this way.



This image took seven returns to the same spot at sunset to capture, and won the BBC and Natural History Museum in London's WPoTY animal behaviour section (Etosha, Namibia)



A moment before the jackal caught the dove (Etosha, Namibia). This photo won the US Natures Best Magazine animal behaviour section and also earned me the title of South African Wildlife Photographer of the Year in another competition

I conclude this article with a link to my one-page ABC of wildlife photography that you may find useful as it basically is a summary of my photography philosophy and beliefs... [www.johanjbotha.com/educational/](http://www.johanjbotha.com/educational/)

