



PHOTO MASTERCLASS PART EIGHT

in association with
TAMRON®

ANIMALS IN THEIR ENVIRONMENT



Pulling back from your subject and revealing the world in which it lives enables you to imbue the image with tension and drama. In a sense, you become a story-teller. But to make this work, you need to learn a few simple but important lessons.

WITH WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER MARK CARWARDINE

MANY PHOTOGRAPHERS FORGET to take pictures of animals in their environment. They are too focused on frame-filling portraits that reveal every hair or feather to think about including more of the habitat than the subject itself. But some of the most memorable and powerful wildlife images ever taken include large tracts of long grass, rocks, sky, reflections, waves or whatever else surrounded the animal at the time. They provide a true sense of wilderness and reveal more about the subject than is possible with any extreme close-up.

Contrary to popular belief, this is not an easy option for wildlife photographers. Just getting everything into the picture is nowhere near enough, and there are many traps for the uninitiated. The biggest mistake is to fall

into a poorly composed 'no-man's land', in which the subject isn't quite large enough in the frame and yet isn't small enough either. It looks merely as if you should have used a longer telephoto lens. Instead, when the animal occupies a very small part of the frame, the trick is to use a clever combination of light and composition to draw your attention like a beacon.

So this month we'll be pulling back from the 'get in close and fill the frame' mantra of many wildlife photographers and taking a much wider view. The aim is to add a whole new dimension to your picture-taking by transforming 'no-man's land' snapshots of animals lost in their environment into stylish and striking images of animals at one with their surroundings.

▲ In this image, the moose is positioned walking out of the frame, creating a sense of drama and uncertainty. Where has it come from and where is it going? Why is it alone? You see the cold, harsh world in which it survives – emphasised by its braced, weary stance – and you shiver with it.

MEET THE EXPERT...

Every issue, our world famous photographers share their knowledge and skills.

THOMAS D MANGELSEN USA

Internationally acclaimed nature photographer and conservationist Tom Mangelsen has won many awards, including Wildlife Photographer of the Year and Nikon's Legend Behind the Lens.



Tom Mangelsen is passionate about photographing animals in their environment. "My background in film-making has made me aware of how difficult it can be to tell a story in a single image," he says, "so shooting animals in their natural habitat helps me paint a bigger picture."

Tom spends up to nine months a year in the field. When he finds a suitable subject, he tends to shoot a few insurance pictures first, "just to get something in the bag", but then he stops to think about how to make the best of the situation. "When you find the right animal in a beautiful setting and in gorgeous light, there may be 50 or 100 possible compositions," he explains.

When the animal is small in the frame, Tom stresses that it's particularly important

When the animal is small in the frame, it's particularly important to have a very strong composition.

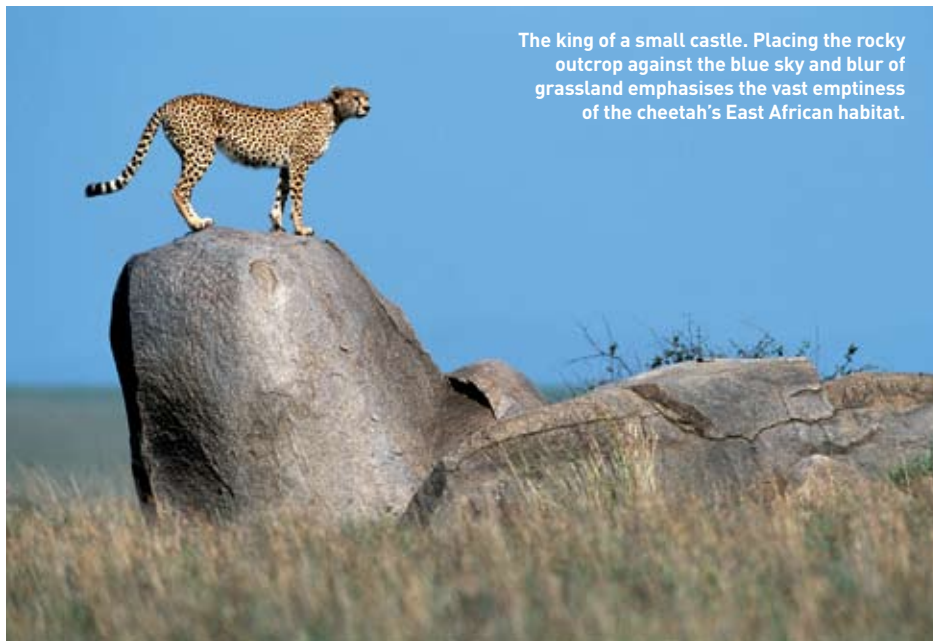
to have a very strong composition. "But don't be afraid to break photographic rules," he says. "Experiment with the animals walking out of the frame, for example, because you might create extra tension and drama."

As events unfold, Tom loves dreaming of the 'what if' moments – "what if the moose was to walk over that ridge or the bald eagle was to perch on that tree?" he says.

"Wishing for these moments is a lot of fun, and the better you get to know a place or an animal, the better you are able to predict when something's about to happen."

It takes perseverance, though. "I've been photographing polar bears for 20 years," says Tom, "but it was at least five before I started getting the shots I really wanted."

Tom's animals-in-their-environment photography tips



The king of a small castle. Placing the rocky outcrop against the blue sky and blur of grassland emphasises the vast emptiness of the cheetah's East African habitat.

1 Move around

The most useful tool a photographer has is a pair of feet – use them to move around to find the best position. Don't just shoot from where you happened to park the car or where everyone else is standing. Keep moving until there are no distracting elements and everything in the frame works towards the final image.

Gathering clouds create mood. After dwelling on the foreground figure, your eye naturally follows the river and picks out more fishing bears.



2 Think about the light

Good light is everything in photography. Even if you have an interesting animal in a beautiful environment, the image will be boring if the light is boring. Go back and try again if you can, and persevere in bad weather. Many of the most dramatic wildlife images were taken in heavy rain, snowstorms or fog.



YOUR STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE...

Mark Carwardine shows you how to apply the theory to get the perfect picture.

1 THINK ABOUT COMPOSITION



- » Compose the picture with your subject walking, flying or looking *into* the frame rather than out of it – and then try breaking this photographic rule to see the difference. Try composing through an empty 35mm slide mount (or with your forefingers and thumbs) before taking the picture.
- » Experiment by placing the animal at various points in the frame. Try a third of the way in from any two sides rather than dead centre.
- » Watch the horizon – don't place it bang in the middle of the frame and don't let it cut through your main subject.

2 DON'T LOSE YOUR SUBJECT



- » Avoid clutter – severely cluttered surroundings will make the animal disappear. Move into a better position or, if the background is too distracting, use a wider aperture to throw it out of focus. Keep recomposing until you have removed any elements that do not add to the overall picture.
- » Work with the light to make the main subject as bright as the surrounding habitat (or, ideally, even brighter).
- » Avoid light, featureless skies. These are boring and surprisingly distracting and ruin many pictures of animals in their environment.

3 EXPERIMENT WITH DIFFERENT LENSES



- » Use a range of different lenses (not merely a short or medium telephoto) to achieve different effects.
- » Get in close with a wide-angle lens to make the subject dominate the frame while still providing a sense of space. This works well with approachable subjects, such as gulls or penguins.
- » Pull back with a powerful telephoto lens. This will compress the spatial relationship between the subject and its surroundings, giving the illusion that the background is much closer than it really is, and creates a unique sense of drama.

4 THINK ENVIRONMENT



- » Don't just shoot animals in their environment as a 'second best' if you can't get frame-filling portraits. Set out with this kind of picture in mind as much as you would with any other kind of photography.
- » Be aware of the colours, textures and patterns of the animal's habitat and learn to use these in your pictures. Look for elements that will add to the scene, such as colourful foliage, intriguing clouds or branches that provide natural frames.
- » Shoot animals in their environment first and then take your time to stalk closer afterwards.



ESSENTIAL KIT... SHORT OR MEDIUM TELEPHOTO LENS



Few animals allow you to get in really close with a wide-angle lens, and it can often be difficult to pull back far enough with a super-telephoto. A short or medium telephoto lens is therefore ideal for photographing animals in their environment. It helps to create a sense of drama, by compressing the distance between the subject and its background, and provides just the right magnification to include plenty of habitat as well.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- » **70-300mm focal length** – the lens options within this range are staggering, but consider a zoom rather than a fixed focal length to give more flexibility.
- » **Glass quality** – the better the optics, the more critically sharp pictures you will obtain. Generally speaking, the more money you spend, the better the lens. Many professionals advise buying one top-quality lens rather than two inferior ones.

CHEAPER ALTERNATIVES:

- » **Compact camera** with a reasonable optical zoom. Don't use the digital zoom – switch it off completely. The quality is usually extremely poor.

DOS & DON'TS

- » **DO pay attention** to your subject's body language. The position of an animal's legs or ears, for example, is as important in a distant shot as it is in extreme close-up.
- » **DO take the time** to explore a good location and try to identify potential images before shooting.
- » **DO keep a notebook** with sketches and ideas for possible pictures.
- » **DON'T go home** if the weather is bad – protect your camera and keep shooting.

In association with TAMRON



Tamron AF 18-200mm F3.5-6.3 A new high-powered zoom lens designed for exclusive use on digital SLR cameras. Winner of the 'Best Consumer Lens 2005' from TIPA (Technical Image Press Association).

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MASTERCLASS CHALLENGE UK...



Photographing animals in their habitat is a useful skill to develop, and all subjects are suitable. Top British photographer **Laurie Campbell** offers expert guidance.

Ladybird on foliage

Photographing insects is technically difficult, particularly if you are attempting to take frame-filling portraits. A safer option is to locate a brightly coloured species against a contrasting background and to photograph it smaller in the frame using various elements within the scene to aid composition. The results can be as impressive as any close-up.



Moth on tree trunk

Moths are easier to photograph than butterflies because they often rely on camouflage rather than flight as their first line of defence. To lessen the risk of disturbance, avoid using a flash and gently work a tripod into position, taking care not to disturb the surrounding vegetation. This way, it's possible to use natural lighting and take your time.



Deer in woodland

The advantage of photographing deer in woodland rather than on an open hillside is that there is more natural cover to make stalking easier. Wear camouflage clothing and always approach from downwind. Avoid treading on twigs, and dodge from tree to tree taking pictures as you get closer. If you get too close, the deer will hear your camera's shutter.



Sparrowhawk in a tree

The ability to react to a surprise encounter, such as a sparrowhawk launching from its perch, is essential, so get into the habit of walking around with your camera ready and the exposure preset, preferably to a high shutter speed. Speeds of 1/1000th of a second or less will freeze the bird's wingbeats and, by shooting digitally, you can make as many attempts as you need.



MASTERCLASS READER PHOTO OF THE MONTH

Now practise your new photography skills on your local British wildlife. Use all of our experts' hints and tips to take pictures of any British animal in its environment. Upload your photos on our website and the winning image will be published in *BBC Wildlife* and on our website.

HOW TO ENTER

Log on to www.bbcwildlifemagazine.com and click on Photo Masterclass, then follow the instructions to upload your images. Closing date: Weds 27 Sept.

RULES 1) The competition is open only to amateur photographers. 2) Up to two entries only per category. 3) Entry of a picture constitutes a grant to BBC Worldwide to publish it in all media. 4) Entries will be judged by *BBC Wildlife*. 5) The winning image will be published in the November issue. 6) No correspondence will be entered into and winners will not be notified. 7) Entries will not be accepted by post or email.



'INVERTEBRATE PORTRAITS' WINNER: M LATHAM
An outstanding class and one of the hardest to judge so far. We received many stunning images and finally selected this orange-tip butterfly for its subtle lighting and delicate composition, which accentuate the fragility of the subject. See the runners-up on our website.