

The Curious Life of the Wildlife Photographer

Wildlife photography should mean muddy boots, frozen extremities, and exceptional amounts of patience. Yet, as pro photographers we seem, and need, to spend vast amounts of time processing and doing admin jobs. **Kaleel Zibe** reports

Sometimes I wonder if I am actually a wildlife photographer. I can go for weeks when I do not even pick up a camera, least of all go out and shoot wildlife with one.

I seem to spend a disproportionate amount of my time sitting in front of my laptop in the studio drinking gallons of coffee; I must stop drinking quite so much, in fact.

Actual photography means muddy boots, frozen extremities, and Zen-like patience in a forest: photography is my element, but appears to be something I indulge in between more urgent activities such as accounts, web sites, marketing, and bills.

I also do a lot of commercial work that has nothing to do with nature photography: people, machinery, buildings, corporate events and sport. I am sure I am not alone amongst professional nature photographers in taking a rather catholic approach to income generation.

However, I have not come here to whinge. In fact, I thoroughly enjoy some of the non-nature commercial work; but wildlife resolutely is where my heart is.

Clearly, this month's picture is not of a spanner, or a corporate headquarters. Couple this with the fact that lions became extinct in the UK at least 12,000 years ago and you will not be surprised to know that this picture was captured in Kenya's Masai Mara last October.

I am careful not to draw too much of a distinction between 'exotic' locations such as the Mara and my home county because wildlife is just as beautiful wherever you see it. The only problem in Northumberland is that you are a lot less likely actually to see it.

A couple of years ago I realised that I genuinely love teaching photography to people. This surprised me completely as I always assumed I'd make a poor tutor. However, what

I had not factored in was that I am teaching my own passion: nature photography. It has never stopped being a hobby as well as a profession and I love to learn continually myself. The day I declare that I know everything about photography is the day someone needs to give me a sharp shove into the path of a disgruntled buffalo.

The addition of teaching photography has led, through the best kind of serendipity, to a superb working relationship with my business partners and pals Alan Hewitt (at Hawk's Head Photography) and Trai Anfield (at Enlightened Media). The joint trip to Kenya was to check out the fantastic accommodation and wildlife for our 2013 safaris, teaching small groups of photographers how to photograph and film the awesome fauna of East Africa with their DSLRs.

Having seen lots of lions, this young lioness struck me as particularly photogenic. She and her brother were play-fighting and generally loafing about in the dawn light before the heat made them dozy. What stunning creatures they were: sinuous, lithe, powerful beasts, but playing like pussycats. My favourite capture is this pensive glance back to her brother; what poise and majesty.

Moments like this make all the desk-work, VAT returns and insurance paperwork vanish into thin air. I am so privileged to be able to do this job.

Northumberland at this time of year is rather cold and bleak in a beautiful way. The county is full of wildlife of course, but it is pretty much all hiding and takes a lot of work to coax it onto a camera's sensor. Warm memories of the Mara's lions will keep me sustained until I can return later this year.

I do not get a great deal of time out there with nature. But when I do, it is a cathartic experience. ✦

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Kaleel Zibe
Kaleel has been a professional photographer, getting muddy and wet waiting for wildlife at dawn, since 2008. He has written the book 'Wildlife of the Farne Islands' and runs wildlife photography workshops with Alan Hewitt at Hawk's Head Photography.
www.kaleelzibe.com

Nikon D4
Nikkor 200-400mm f/4 @ 400mm
f/4, 1/500sec, ISO 400
+2/3 EV, bean bag, from jeep

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