



Taken in Ndutu, Tanzania, in extreme low light levels

Wild at Heart



WDC discovers how two readers with professional aspirations took the bold step of self-publishing their own book of wildlife photography

So you've pored over the camera magazines, bought the self-help books, surfed the net for advice and discussed your images on a photo forum or two. But two readers have bravely taken their first steps to wider recognition by self-funding and publishing a portfolio of wildlife shots, accrued on trips to Tanzania and Kenya, as a soft-cover coffee table book.

Chris Windram and Peter Hale met on one such outing and have been fortunate enough to have been schooled in the art of capturing the fanged and the hoofed by pro wildlife photographer Andy Rouse who, says Chris, gave invaluable encouragement when they were putting together their 'Migration Plains' project. Having learnt how to shoot striking imagery, they then had to teach themselves layout and page design, find a printer who wouldn't charge a prohibitive amount – and then discover how best to bring it to market and start selling copies to recoup their investment. They told us the story.

WDC: What is it about wildlife photography that attracts you as a subject?

Chris Windram: I've never been drawn to landscapes or architecture, beautiful as they may be, but seeing nature at its best inspires me, and Peter too. We met four years ago when sharing a tent on my first organised photography trip to Kenya. We found we had a lot in common and have subsequently gone on self-arranged trips together to the Masai Mara, Tanzania, Finland – and have just arranged to go to the Falkland Islands for a couple of weeks later this year to photograph penguins, sea lions and birds of prey.

Why did you decide to self-publish your work?

We'd been looking for direction, and it transpired that the idea of a book had independently crossed our minds. We'd

been going to these wonderful places, seeing some amazing sights and coming away with photographs that we felt, from the standpoint of amateurs, weren't too shoddy. So we set ourselves the goal of putting a book together. During our initial conversations the idea seemed a bit 'pie in the sky', but we gradually started to make progress and the mechanics of putting the book together gelled quite quickly over a six-month period.

How did you decide which images to include in the book and which to omit?

The images that we were most proud of were mainly from Tanzania and Kenya. From that we derived the premise of following the route of the migration, showing the animals you'd

"The idea seemed a bit pie in the sky"



meet along the way, which gave us a fairly wide scope. We then looked at each other's photographs and fairly unemotionally chose the ones that we liked and didn't like and compared notes at the end, trying to make sure we had a balance between the different sorts of animals. There are a few sequences of chases and kills in there. Without sounding pretentious it's a privilege to see these things and photograph them.

What cameras do you both shoot on?

We try and match the equipment we take with us – we were shooting on the Canon EOS 1Ds Mark II as the main body. I've got an EOS 20D as a back up and Peter has a 350D for the same purpose. We use the Canon 500mm f4 lens as our 'workhorse', occasionally with converters on the end that we steadied via clamps on the rails of the Land Rover's roof bars. We also use a 70-200mm f2.8, plus a wideangle for the →



Taken during appalling weather conditions in the Gorongoro Carter, Tanzania

CHRIS AND PETER'S KIT



CAMERA

Both Chris and Peter use the **Canon EOS-1D Mk II** as their primary bodies. 'For us the choice of Canon was quite straightforward,' says Chris. 'The EOS 1D made DSLR photography more affordable for amateurs like ourselves. It proved itself a reliable workhorse and remains a trusty backup. The move to the EOS-1D Mk II came from finding ourselves pushing the boundaries of the 1D and wanting to continue to develop our photography. Features such as the improved focusing, frame-rate and write speed were all factors.'



LENSES

'We both use Canon lenses, mostly the L-series. Our favourite lens for wildlife photography is the fantastic **Canon 500mm f/4L**. It's beautifully made, performs brilliantly, and can amply withstand the beatings it takes while on safari! You can also put 1.4x or even 2x multipliers on the lens and still achieve a good quality result. For wildlife photography the stabilisation is a key factor, and this is something that the Canon lenses provide very successfully. When shooting at f/4, the background blur you get can really bring a picture to life, and helps to accentuate the subject (see below).



BACKUP DEVICES

When out in the field we backup our cards as we go to two separate Nextodi backup devices. These are exceedingly basic, but blindingly fast – plus they have a very good throughput-to-battery life ratio. Upon returning home, the drives are firstly backed up to DVD, then two separate NAS drives and then finally the files are viewed (and most deleted!).

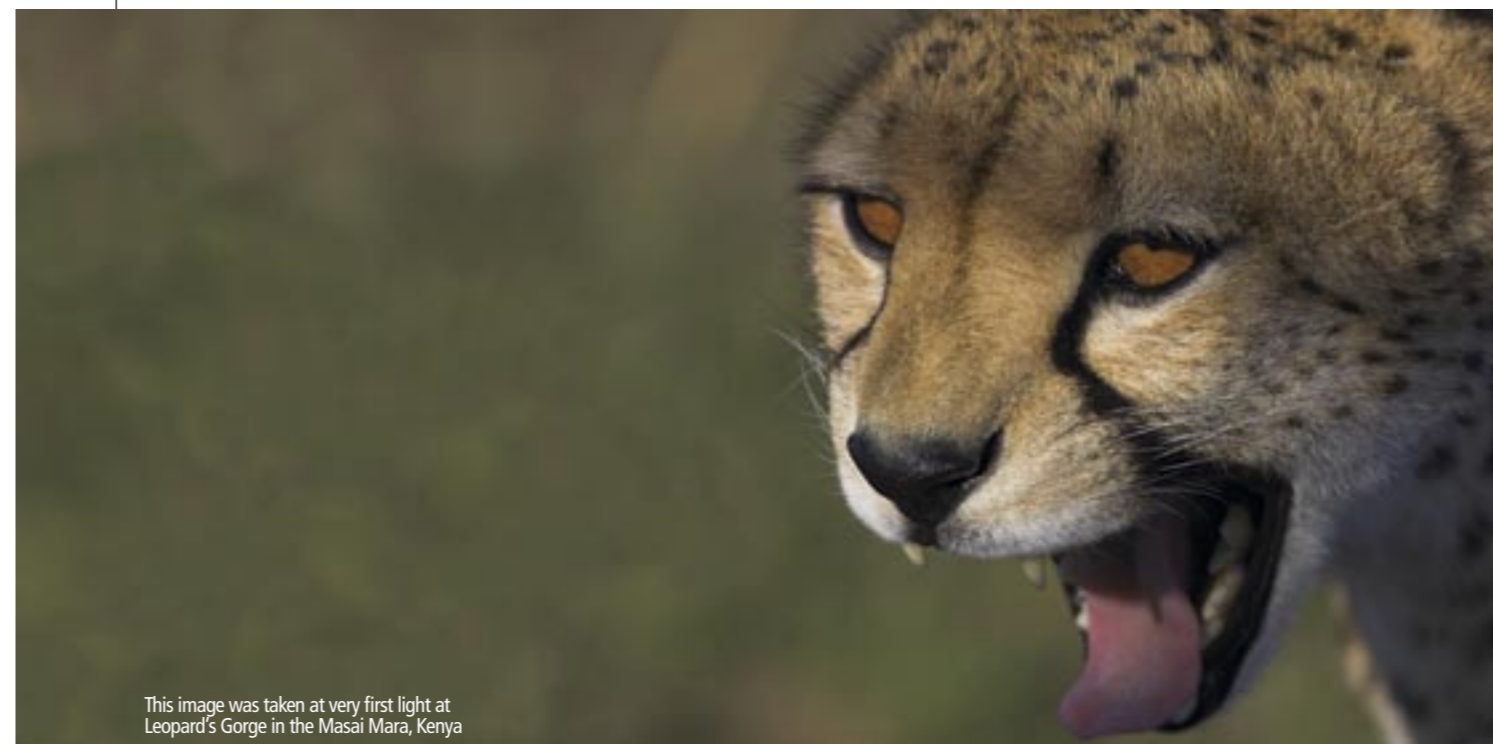


PRINTING

Our final output to print varies from **Epson R800** to **Epson Pro 4000** printers. Almost always Epson glossy paper is the paper of choice, although the Epson backlight film can also produce some interesting results. Monitor calibration is performed using SpyderPro II.



This male Rock Agama lizard was sunning himself and showing off his magnificent colours on a rock in the Serengeti



This image was taken at very first light at Leopard's Gorge in the Masai Mara, Kenya

occasional landscape. We also exclusively hire the vehicle, so we don't have to annoy anyone else by sitting in the same place for hours waiting for something to happen. We did have one scary moment, when a cheetah tried to make his way into the back of the

we thought that was the only avenue open to us. Working through that we learnt an enormous amount about the idiosyncrasies of converting RGB files to CMYK for print, and how to use publishing tools such as Illustrator and InDesign. After getting our heads around Photoshop it came pretty intuitively. But ultimately we decided that print-on-demand was not for us, because to get the quality we wanted it was going to cost us around £25 a copy, which was prohibitive. So we found our own print company in China, who were enormously helpful in pointing out things that would have tripped us up. By going that route we were able to drive the costs down massively to about £2.50 per unit and the quality from a four-colour print process was a lot better than digital printing would have been. We then had to look into acquiring barcodes, copyright registration and protection...

sales online, but we've had some orders from bookshops as well. The list price is £16.99, and Amazon takes 60%. Out of our 40% we have to cover the cost of the books, packaging and delivery. So for us there's not that much money to be made from the process – it's more about the achievement.



"He had two paws in the vehicle"

Land Rover with its non-retractable claws. Fortunately its mother convinced it to change its mind, but there was a moment when he had two paws in the vehicle!

What's your 'modus operandi'?

For most of our photography, we use a fairly wide aperture. This enables us to use a fast shutter speed to capture the action, and provides a shallow depth of field so that the eye is drawn to the subject. It also allows us to keep shooting in reduced light levels.

We mainly shoot in Aperture priority or Manual mode, using evaluative metering, as the 1D tends to do this very well. Spot metering is sometimes used for difficult light conditions, such as a leopard up a tree.

We always shoot in RAW mode, mostly using 4GB CF cards. In a day it is not unknown to shoot in excess of 20GB! Recently we've processed images using RawShooter, which we found to be head and shoulders above the competition. With Lightroom out, it'll be interesting to see how it performs. Final editing is done in Photoshop.

How easy was it to do all the book editing and design yourselves?

We looked into print-on-demand services on the Internet, including lulu.com, because

Sounds like quite a steep learning curve – did you at any stage have second thoughts?

There was one stage where I'd commissioned the printing and the books had made it back to the UK, but there was a raft of paperwork involved in getting them through Customs. It required a considerable amount of effort to make sure we didn't incur any charges we shouldn't have done. Once the books had left China they sat in limbo in terms of responsibility and when they arrived in the UK nobody seemed to want to take any ownership of them when they sat in the port. That's probably one area I wish I'd researched and thought about a bit more before going ahead. But now that I know the answers it's actually not that involved.

Where are the books being sold?

Via Amazon.co.uk, and through any bookshop, because they are officially ISBN registered. Most business has been direct

What has the reaction been?

A great deal has changed for both of us since we released the book and we've been presented with more opportunities. We're both still in full-time employment (I run a recruitment software company and Peter is a telecoms analyst) but I've been approached to do some portrait work, which is new for me, and the support we've been given by the industry has broadened. Wildlife photography is a competitive market, but we're delighted that the book has generated such interest.

WDC READER OFFER!

Want to buy the book?

Instead of the list price of £16.99, WDC readers can take advantage of our special offer of just **£11.99** per book, plus £2 P&P. Simply send your name, delivery details and number of books required, along with a cheque made payable to Stock Images Limited to:

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