



Photographing Wildlife

Introduction

Wildlife photography is a sensitive issue that requires ethics and respect. It is imperative to understand the wildlife you plan to photograph, their habits, and habitat. After all you are entering their home! All things in nature are connected one with another to create a perfect natural system. Do not forget that we as humans are also part of this system. Unfortunately, our society as a whole is no longer intimately connected to this system like in days past. We sit in our comfortable homes, watch TV, and surf the Internet. Pavement, cars, grocery stores and other distractions surround us. We get so accustomed to having the world revolve around our needs, that we lose touch with the wild animal in all of us. When we head out into the wild to photograph, often times we expect the animals, weather, and other elements to cooperate with our agenda. This is a very dangerous attitude to have. Before entering the wild, be sure to forget your modern mentality and get in touch with the wild animal inside yourself. When you become a part of nature yourself, the natural world will open up to you in ways you could never imagine.

Education

The first thing any photographer needs to do before entering the wild, is to become educated in the subject he/she desires to photograph. Why become educated? Not only will it allow you to capture stunning photographs, it may just save your life! This is particularly important when photographing any of the large mammals, or predators. However education is also vital when photographing the small harmless wild animals, such as birds and insects. The best way to become educated on a certain subject or animal is to read about it, and talk to those who have experienced it. You can do this very easily through the Internet, libraries, and bookstores. The important part of education is to educate yourself based on a variety of view points. Do not just



stick with one author, but read as many articles as possible, both positive and negative. Only then can you formulate your own tactics and views regarding your subject. Learn as much about habitat and habits of each subject. With this information you will be able to determine when and where photographic situations will be perfect, or potentially deadly. For example, if you head out across the tundra and do not realize that when a grizzly bear makes a strange popping noise with its jaw it is ready to charge, you could be in real trouble. Even worse, what happens when you stumble on a mother moose and her new calf, what should you do? What about Elk, how do you approach one, and when is the best time to do so? These are only a fraction of questions that every wildlife photographer faces, and needs to know how to properly handle. In short, learn, learn, learn for that is the way to photograph wildlife in a safe, friendly way.

Getting Close to Wildlife

When people view my wildlife photography, they often ask me how I got so close to the animal. The answer to most of these questions is, "I did not get close to the animal, it got close to me." By educating myself on the different subjects I was able to put myself in great situations. There is however one



underlying rule in getting close to wildlife, or letting them get close to you; they must know you are NOT a threat to them in any way. If you are a hunter and try these techniques they simply will not work! Why? Because you ARE a threat to these animals, and believe me wild animals are not dumb. Just spend a little time with them and you will find that out very quickly. Animals are like us, they have lives, needs, instincts, and they are always aware of things out of the ordinary. After all these perceptions are what keep them alive, and they are very good at it! If you approach a moose in the same manner as a wolf, i.e. crouching down, not moving when it looks at you, hiding behind a bush or a tree all the while creeping closer and closer; do you think the moose is going to stand there and wait for you to get close? Not a chance! That moose will be gone before you can even raise your lens.

The key is to stand there, don't crouch or sneak. Let the animal know you are there, let it know what you are and that you are not a threat. How do you show it you are not a threat? Do not move in a threatening manner. Stay in the open and give the animal plenty of room, and do not push it out of its comfort zone. If you are educated, you will know when that comfort zone has been breached, and it is time to back off. If you provide a non-threatening environment for the animal, it may just come up to you. Photographing wildlife takes patience and education. If you acquire these two traits, your images will be great!