



Capturing the Moment

Being charged by a young bull elephant in the Okavanga Delta in Botswana was just one of many amazing adventures experienced by this intrepid professional nature photographer, writer and tutor.



Michael Snedic

Some 19 years ago, I picked up a film camera as a way of showing my photos to family and friends, highlighting some of the incredible experiences I was having out in nature. I didn't plan on nature photography being my career, but after publishers started seeing my work and wanting to purchase my images for publishing, the 'seeds were sown', as the old saying goes. I then started teaching photographers how to use their cameras to take better images – eventually this became my career. I'm now a full-time, professional nature photographer, writer and tutor, travelling across Australia and the world to photograph, present photography workshops and adventures, speak at camera clubs and photo conventions, judge photography competitions and write articles for major photographic magazines.

I use certain photographic techniques that have worked for me for many years. For wildlife photography, I suggest hand-holding your camera and lens, as this gives so much flexibility when the animal inevitably moves. I use aperture priority, as this allows me to shoot 'wide-open' (i.e. widest aperture/smallest number), and therefore a faster shutter speed and less chance of a blurry image. In many instances, it also creates a lovely, blurred-out background.

Since wildlife can move around a bit, continuous auto-focus is definitely recommended, especially back-button focus. This enables you to focus on the moving target and then press the shutter button separately, without potentially losing focus to the background. For landscapes, I suggest using a sturdy, but light tripod >>

Photos

Left: Dead Vlei – Namibia, Africa

Above: Michael Snedic with Sir David Attenborough



(such as carbon fibre). A tripod helps in composing the shot and also stops any camera/lens movement. A cable release or remote is also recommended. For seascapes, a graduated neutral density filter is recommended, as this will reduce exposure in the sky and lighten the foreground. You can also do the same by post-processing in programs such as Lightroom, but I prefer using the filters.

I tend to use an aperture of around f11-f16 for most landscape shots, when using a wide-angled lens. This generally gives enough depth-of-field, and stops potential diffraction (losing quality around the edge of an image), which can occur when using an aperture of f22 or smaller (in size).

My images have been exhibited at the prestigious Cradle Mountain Lodge Wilderness Gallery and I have had quite a number of highly-commended winners

in the ANZANG wildlife and nature photography competition.

For inspiration, I enjoy viewing the winners of one of the world's most renowned wildlife and nature photography competitions, 'BBC Wildlife Photographer of the Year'. It's always great to see what the world's best photographers are doing and viewing the shooting specs on each image.

I love taking images of wildlife and nature because I enjoy being in the outdoors – it is invigorating and relaxing at the same time. I also love the 'excitement' of capturing some special moment forever, and photography is my creative outlet. I also genuinely love sharing my photographic skills with others, which is why I became a professional wildlife/nature photography tutor.



Without doubt, the legendary Sir David Attenborough is my all-time inspiration. His passion, enthusiasm and knowledge of the natural world is unsurpassed. I had the pleasure of spending a week working with and assisting Sir David some years ago, up in the rainforests of Lamington National Park, Queensland, while he was working on a documentary on bowerbirds. It was a 'dream come true' for me. He was so very charming, humble and giving of his precious time. Even now, nearing 90, Sir David is still working and as passionate as ever. An absolute legend!!

There have been many lessons I have learnt over the 19 years that I have been a nature photographer. Being incredibly patient has to be a major lesson, especially when wanting to get shots of wildlife activity such as birds in flight, breaching whales or similar. I have learnt that you must never get frustrated when things don't work out. Keep trying, never give up, and familiarise yourself with your camera really well by learning your camera's settings inside-and-out, and also the best photographic techniques. This will allow you to concentrate on getting the best possible image, >>

Photos

Left: Horseshoe Falls – Tasmania.
Below left: Pacific Baza with chick
Below: Uluru sunset – Red Centre, Northern Territory





rather than wasting precious time working out where things are on the camera and what settings to use.

Another major lesson is to not rest on your laurels. Always look for new subjects, different photographic techniques to try, and experiment with compositions. That way it keeps your photography fresh and interesting. Attending workshops such as the ones I present, allows photographers a chance to learn how to best use their camera(s) as well as learning the best photographic techniques to use in various situations. On these workshops, I take photographers to the most photogenic subjects and locations in nature, both here in Australia and overseas. Another way of honing your photographic skills is to read photography magazines and books, or link up with other like-minded photographers and share the skills you have learnt.

Some of my most amazing photographic experiences include:

- Photographing the rare and elusive Albert's Lyrebird displaying while sitting in a cold, cramped camouflaged hide, in the middle of winter, for just short of seven weeks. I became the fourth

Photos

Above: Aurora Australis – Freycinet Coast – Tasmania
Left: White-lipped Green Tree Frog

Opposite page:
Top: Sunset over Kerry Valley – Queensland
Bottom: Mountain Gorilla with baby.

known person in the world to photograph this rare bird display.

- Sitting at eye-level in a bird hide on top of a 22 metre high tower, some three to four metres away from a gorgeous Pacific Baza (bird of prey) with its fluffy chick.
 - Photographing the stunningly beautiful Aurora Australis overlooking the Hazard Mountains in Coles Bay, Freycinet, Tasmania. The colour in the sky that night was green, purple, pink and red. Absolutely breathtaking!!
 - Being charged by a young bull elephant in the Okavanga Delta, Botswana, Africa, while in the back of a four-wheel drive heading the other way, camera and lens pointed at the angry elephant!!
 - Being metres away from a young silverback Mountain Gorilla in Rwanda, Africa and having him 'photo bomb' the shot I was getting taken in front of him! It looks like he is laughing at my attempt at getting an image with him.
 - Spending a few hours in a Cessna 172, photographing the incredibly rare, white humpbacked whale as it swam past Moreton Island on its migration northwards.
- I have been presenting photographic workshops and adventure across Australia for the last 13 years or so. I love sharing my photographic knowledge and experience with attendees and get a real thrill when >>



I see them improve throughout the workshop and subsequent workshops.

Locations I present photographic workshops in Australia include Tasmania (Cradle Mountain, Freycinet and also the Tarkine region), Norfolk Island, Lord Howe Island, Lamington National Park (Gold Coast hinterland, Queensland), the Red Centre, Kangaroo Island, Fraser Island, Girraween National Park (Queensland), as well as speciality bird photography workshops (Queensland's Bunya Mountains and Bowra Sanctuary) and whale photography workshops.

Overseas photographic adventures I present include stunning Africa (Okavanga Delta, Namibia, Tanzania, Madagascar, Sabi Sands and Rwanda), Antarctica, the Sub-Antarctic/Macquarie Island and the Arctic. Other photographic tours planned include Galapagos Island, Peru (including the Inca Trail) and Japan.

Apart from showing workshop participants the most photogenic subjects and locations in the nature world both in Australia and overseas, I also aim to make sure that each participant receives plenty of photography tuition, both as group tuition and one-on-one time. I have always been an advocate of 'getting it right in camera' and then doing minimal post-processing. I certainly am not saying I don't post-process my images, but am not a fan of over-processed, fake-looking images. This isn't for everyone, but certainly works for me!

The best piece of advice I can give anyone wanting to improve their photographic skills is to keep practising and never, ever give up. Your 'eye' will also become more attuned to composing great shots and you will have a ball in the process!! Even after 19 years of photographing wildlife and nature, my passion and enthusiasm for this genre of photography is stronger than ever. There are so many amazing wildlife species to photograph, and a never-ending number of incredible landscape locations to visit. I encourage you to get on out there with your camera and happy shooting!

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Photos

Top right: Juvenile Barn Owls
Bottom right: Osprey with fish

Top right: Cheetah cubs –
Okavanga Delta – Africa
Bottom right: Albert's Lyre-
bird displaying
Bottom right: Picnic Rock –
Mt William N.P. – Tasmania

Opposite page: .
Top left: Mt Barney –
Queensland

