



# POWERFUL PERSPECTIVES

BY MICHAEL SNEDIC

Perspective can make a huge difference when it comes to photographing wildlife, with your choice of lens, framing, position, and use of light all having the potential to change how a viewer interprets your work. Here's a crash course in capturing more powerful perspectives.

By slowly edging closer to your subject(s) over time, you can basically win their trust in many cases. This comes into its own when using a wide-angle lens, which will allow you to not only capture an unusual perspective, but, as in this case of these two boobies on Norfolk Island, the landscape they inhabit as well. Nikon D200, 10-20mm f/4-5.6 lens @ 15mm. 1/200s @ f5, ISO 320.



As photographers, the tools we use and the decisions we make can drastically change the look of the subjects we capture. By changing perspective, whether it be by moving, or choosing different camera settings or focal lengths, subjects can appear much smaller or larger than normal, lines can converge differently, and much more. In this article I'll share a few tips for pushing your perspectives in interesting new directions. Let's get started.

## TRADITIONAL METHODS

Traditionally, most wildlife images are taken with a fixed focal length telephoto lens such as a 300mm, 400mm, 500mm or 600mm, or by using one of the numerous zoom lenses available on the market like a 100-400mm, 200-400mm, 200-500mm, etc. This is because in wildlife photography our subjects are rarely close. But if you only use longer focal lengths all the time, you're selling yourself short, and with the right subjects, just about any focal length can be used for wildlife photography.

Before we get started, it's worth noting that tele-

photo prime lenses like the 300mm, 400mm, 500mm and 600mm are usually very sharp and have a wider minimum aperture. This means you can let in more light into your camera, which in turn means a higher shutter speed without needing to crank up the ISO too high (the higher the ISO, the more noise you will end up with). The downside is that these lenses are quite expensive, heavy, and if you can't move from the spot you are photographing (such as sitting in a safari vehicle in Africa, with a lion in front of you) you can't change your focal length.

With a zoom lens, you have more options to compose an image on the spot, they are generally cheaper in price and typically are a bit easier to handhold. The downside is they may not be as sharp as a telephoto lens and the minimum aperture will often be smaller in size. For example, the Sigma and Tamron 150-600mm lenses are very versatile, but in low light scenarios such as rainforests, the widest aperture you can achieve at 600mm is f6.3. This will greatly affect the camera's shutter speed, so in turn you will likely have to raise your camera's ISO to get sharp shots.

Ultimately, the lens you end up using and the focal length you choose will affect how your resulting image looks. Lenses with a wider maximum aperture can create more pleasing out of focus areas, while zooms are more versatile. It's up to you as the photographer to make creative decisions in-camera before you edit your images.

## ANIMALS IN THE ENVIRONMENT

Many of the renowned wildlife photography competitions around the world include a category for animals in their environment, where the animal(s) are a small part of a landscape. This gives the viewer a chance to see how the animal fits into its habitat.

Images where you first see an amazing landscape, then realise there is an animal(s), can be quite pleasing on the eye. You can think of it as value-adding - by adding an animal (or animals) to an already beautiful landscape, you are adding additional points of interest in your image. Your aim here is to draw the viewer to the animal(s), then look at the scene they are in. Just use a deft hand, as you don't want to distract from your subject too much.

LEFT: Another great perspective when photographing wildlife is to incorporate wildlife into a landscape scene. This gives a sense of how the wildlife fits into its habitat. Here, a polar bear and reindeer share a frame. Nikon D850, Nikon 70-200mm f/2.8 lens @ 200mm, 1/4000s @ f5.6, ISO 200.

ABOVE: An interesting perspective is to shoot just a part of an animal, with many species distinctive enough that just a hint of it is enough to suggest to the viewer what they are looking at. Just the eye was all that needed to be sharp for this crocodile shot. Nikon D850, 500mm f/5.6 lens. 1/2500s @ f5.6, ISO 400.

## 3 QUICK TIPS FOR NEW PERSPECTIVES

- Try different lenses focal lengths when photographing wildlife. By experimenting with lenses and focal lengths you can end up capturing images of the same subject but with different perspectives.
- By photographing animals that are minuscule in a stunning landscape, you are creating different points of interest in the image.
- Shooting at eye level creates a 'level playing field', where you are on the same level as your subject and not looking down on a subject, as if it were inferior.



## PHOTO TIPS: PERSPECTIVE

For the image of the four reindeer and a polar bear in Svalbard, the Arctic, on page 38, I was in a zodiac with my photography tour participants, when I noticed the gorgeous light bringing out the blue in the icy landscape. However, it wasn't until we began to approach that I noticed the animals. By capturing the landscape as well as the wildlife it creates a sense of scale which is often not evident when photographing just the landscape on its own.

### CREATING A THREE-DIMENSIONAL LOOK

Using a wide-angle lens such as a 14-24mm on a full frame camera can help create interesting and unusual images with a totally different perspective to many typical wildlife images shot on longer focal lengths. Getting down at eye level and close to a subject (if it allows you to get close) has created many pleasing images for me over the years.

This is because wide-angle lenses when used up-close exaggerate the three-dimensionality of a scene. To me, this close-up wide image creates more of an impact than a nice portrait shot taken with a longer focal length. It also lets you emphasise different parts of your subject, say the eyes or beak of a bird, which can be quite photogenic.

I am often asked "how do you get close to wildlife subjects" when using a wide-angle lens. One answer I give is "lots of patience!" With the shot of the pair of Tasman Boobies sitting on a cliff top at Norfolk Island that opens this story, I spent a couple of hours each morning, over many days, sitting with them, talking calmly and basically letting them see I wasn't a threat. I would always approach very slowly and quietly, sit, and then edge a little closer over time. Wild birds will often let you reasonably close, as long as you don't make sudden, jerky movement and make lots of noise. With the Tasman Boobies, I was eventually at a stage where the pair sat calmly on the hill, while I was quite close with my wide-angle lens.

I was fortunate to have the clouds part slightly and the crepuscular rays shine through. All I needed to do now was sit still and press the shutter. The resulting image captured the birds up close, as well as the moody, brooding stormy weather in the environment these birds inhabit. If I captured this image from a distance with a long lens, you would get very little sense of their environment.

### FIT EVEN MORE IN

Even fish-eye lenses can be used for wildlife photography to give a different perspective. In the image of a lone penguin standing on a small iceberg on page 42-43, I wanted to show the Antarctic landscape while using the penguin to give a sense of scale. But I also wanted to include the people as well, to give a sense of what my experience was like photographing there. Compared to a wide-angle lens, a fisheye



LEFT: By shooting low and using a wide-angle lens with wildlife that you can get reasonably close to, you can create interesting environmental portraits, like in this shot of two royal penguins surrounded by their species. Nikon D810, 14-24mm f/2.8 lens @ 14mm. 1/2000s @ f5.6, ISO 400.

BELOW: Adding people and/or man-made objects in your frame can create a sense of scale. Here, you get a sense of the size of this Humpback Whale by comparing it to the people in the zodiac. Nikon D810, 70-200mm f/2.8 lens + TC @ 240mm. 1/2500s @ f5.6, ISO 320.

**“THE BEST WILDLIFE IMAGES PUT THE VIEWER IN THE FRAME WITH THE SUBJECT. IN TURN, THE VIEWER ENDS UP WITH A STRONGER CONNECTION TO THE SUBJECT...”**





## PHOTO TIPS: PERSPECTIVE



ABOVE: Setting up a wide-angle lens on a low-set tripod and using a remote trigger release can be a great way of getting close to a subject that would otherwise be fearful of your presence. Nikon D850, 14-24mm f/2.8 lens @ 18mm. 1/200s @ f2.8, ISO 1600.

ABOVE RIGHT: A rarely seen perspective can make for a more interesting image. Here, this Rainbow Lorikeet's eye shows beautiful colour and texture. Nikon D850, 105mm f/2.8 lens. 1/250s @ f11, ISO 1600.

RIGHT: A fisheye lens is an extreme wide-angle optic that creates a unique distorted view of the world. Using it here helped me include the photographers and the penguin. Nikon D810, 15mm f/2.8 lens. 1/1600s @ f5, ISO 100.

### USING A TRIGGER REMOTE

You may not always be able to get close to your subjects, however you can get interesting results by using wide-angle lenses on a tripod with a trigger remote. I have done this a few times in situations where the animal regularly does a courtship display, or where there is a bathing, feeding or preening spot. You will need to 'guesstimate' where the individual may be (or you hope it to be) and pre-focus manually. If you use automatic focus, you can't necessarily control where the focus point will end up in your scene. I use a wireless remote release which allows me to sit a distance away and trigger the shutter without spooking the subject, but many cameras have accompanying smartphone apps that do the same thing – check your manual.



## PHOTO TIPS: PERSPECTIVE

lens overly and dramatically distorts the foreground. Here, I used it to create a curved 'frame' of people surrounding the penguin.

### CREATE DEPTH

Another technique that can change perspective is by using depth, which can be useful for situations where you have multiple subjects together. During a trip to Macquarie Island in the Subantarctic, we came across some quite mellow Royal Penguins (see the image on pages 40-41). As there are no predators on the island, the penguins are very chilled. I sat on rocks surrounded by these delightful birds and waited with a wide-angle lens on my camera. As this pair started interacting, I was able to focus on the pair while keeping the other penguins distant in the background. I chose a narrow depth of field to keep

things sharp front-to back and made sure not to cut the horizon at the top to give a sense of place. The result is a dynamic image that shows the birds interacting in their environment while surrounded by their species.

### SHOOT AT EYE LEVEL

The best wildlife images put the viewer in the frame with the subject. In turn, the viewer ends up with a stronger connection to the subject. As a photographer, you have the ability to turn your subject into a 'hero' by framing them from perspectives most people won't normally see.

One simple technique is to capture your subjects at their eye-level. This creates a 'level-playing field', that doesn't infer any hierarchy – by this, I mean your perspective is not looking down (read negatively) on your subject. At the same time, if you can get below your subject and frame them against the sky for example, you can emphasise emotions of size, power and grandeur.

### TURN YOUR ATTENTION TO THE DETAILS

You can also achieve a completely different perspective by focusing in on one part of an animal. This could be anything from the feathers of a bird, the fur of a mammal, the scales of a reptile or the eye(s) of a frog. Typically, images like these are quite abstract, but they are also a great way to expand your repertoire of wildlife images. For the best results, try to focus on a visual anchor that places the animal. For example, if you take a shot of a small part of a zebra's stripes, the viewer will immediately know they are looking at a zebra.

I like this style of imagery because once you start experimenting you have endless possibilities. Here's a tip – if you are using a macro lens for images like these, remember that depth of field can become an issue when shooting so close. Make sure you use a small aperture (in size) to get as much of the detail you are photographing sharp and in focus.

### ALWAYS LOOK AT THE LIGHT

To add a different perspective to a well photographed subject, try shooting it in a different light. This may be a silhouette, a reflection, or even a shadow of an animal. This style of photography can create a sense of mystery around your subject that is captivating to a viewer. It works best on subjects on clear outlines, so try to shoot your subject against a clear background – the horizon is often best.

The best part of trying new ways to photograph wildlife is that it is up to your imagination. Do some research as to where you may find certain wildlife subjects, head out with all the appropriate camera gear and start experimenting. You may fail with some of your shots, but you will succeed with others. As the old saying goes "Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained". Good luck. 📸