



How to take pictures in the wild

Understanding the limitations of your equipment and prepare an equipment checklist. This will help make sure you don't forget essential equipment. Make sure that you plan your photography within the limitations of your equipment. If you do not have a 600mm lens, forget about bird photography. Maybe not true, but without a lot of patience and a great hide setup, you will not be successful. However, you can take amazing photographs of the larger animals using moderate zoom lenses.

Have your camera with you and be prepared. Always have your camera and lenses ready, and make sure all your equipment is switched on and is working. The night before you go out on a game drive, check and reset your camera settings (White Balance, ISO, exposure compensation, file size, quality setting). Make sure your equipment is clean and that the batteries are fully charged. Have spare batteries and memory cards and ideally even a storage device to download your images onto. You can never predict when something amazing might happen and you may have taken a lot of photographs of the one event.

Be patient. It is very difficult to speed up or slow down nature, and without patience you will struggle to get good results. You often need to remain very still for an extended period of time before the animal starts behaving naturally. Very occasionally you'll capture something unique at your first sighting of the animal, but most of the time you just have to be patient. Make sure that you carry some essentials such as water and a hat – then observe the basic elements of camouflage. This does not mean you must act out Rambo, but allowing for taking photographs from dappled shade or the inside of a car (especially when in a game park where animals are quite accustomed to cars), allowing for wind direction, etc, may almost certainly result in good photographs.

Go for diversity. Make sure that you plan to photograph as many different animals as you can. This gives diversity and is the quickest way to build up a portfolio of photographs of animals.

Research the area you'll be visiting. Check the sunrise and sunset times so you can decide on the optimum locations for each time of the day. At sunrise and sunset the light is far softer and it has a beautiful warm colour. Make sure you know what type of animal you want to photograph and where they may be found.

Photograph normal behaviour. Wildlife photography does not always have to be of spectacular animal behaviour. Just seeing normal animal behaviour in a natural environment can make a great photograph. Always look out for some activity that will allow a photograph of the animal in motion. Static images seldom make great images!

Accurate focus is critical. If the animal is looking in your general direction, make sure that you focus on the eyes and try to keep them unobstructed by out of focus branches or leaves. If it is out of focus, chuck it away. Remember depth-of-field. You want to get the entire animal in sharp focus, and at the same time want to isolate it from distracting background. Sometimes you may make the animal a part of the total scene. Ensure that your depth-of-field will allow for this and make sure that the animal does not dominate the scene.

Camera positioning. When photographing smaller wildlife try to photograph from a lower camera angle to accentuate the animal's size.

Anticipate. This can often make the difference between success and failure. Observe the behaviour of the animal before you start. Try to learn the habits of the animal you intend photographing. Practice photographing animals on the move and learn to predict their movements. This is always a lot easier when starting with bigger animals first. By knowing the animal's habits you have a much better chance of putting yourself in the right place at the right time.

Rules. Always observe the rules applicable. If the rule says "Stay in the vehicle", then do so.