

QUEEN OF THE

CASTLE

ON ASSIGNMENT



The Drakensberg mountain range separates South Africa from Lesotho and is appropriately called *uKhahlamba* in Zulu, which means 'barrier of spears'. This splendid escarpment is home to huge birds of prey and draws photographers from afar, all seeking their own image of a bearded or a Cape vulture in flight. At the Giant's Castle bird hide, I decided, however, that I wanted to capture the smaller inhabitants of uKhahlamba as well.

So while my colleagues hid bones under rocks to encourage the vultures to appear, I walked along the edge of a ridge, hunched over like a vulture myself. Staying low to the ground, I searched for a rock that would offer a panoramic view of the surrounding peaks. Once I'd located the perfect spot, I set my camera up and, trying to get the horizon straight with my head held so close to terra firma that my ear was chafing on the surface, I was reminded of awkward suburban evenings playing Twister. I then settled back, knowing that the easy and pleasurable part lay ahead.

All I had to do was sit inside a hide and stare at the beautiful mountains for a couple of days, hoping that a bird of any description would hop into view and, more specifically, onto the tip of the rock. It was blind hope, the kind that every wildlife photographer possesses.

Three days, a dozen muffins and three flasks of coffee later, a small nondescript bird tripped onto the rock as if it were its personal throne. The LBJ surveyed its majestic kingdom for a few brief seconds, during which time I pressed my remote trigger so hard that I feared the button would break! Rushing out of the hide and scaring the vultures away, I checked my camera's LCD. I soon realised that this female buff-streaked chat had just become the true giant of Giant's Castle.

'On assignment' takes you behind the scenes of some of Africa's most arresting wildlife photographs.

ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPH

Subject Buff-streaked chat *Oenanthe bifasciata*

Camera 35-mm DSLR; 24-mm focal length; f22; exposure 1/50 of a second; remote trigger

ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER

Greg du Toit is a fine art wildlife photographer whose dynamic collections represent wildlife images that he has captured on camera while living permanently in the wild places of four countries in Africa. He chooses his settings carefully, spending many months each year waiting patiently to record nature's most special and intimate moments. To see more of his work, go to www.gregdutoit.com

