



Night drive

Photography after dark is far more challenging than shooting during the golden twilight hour, but the rewards can be stupendous. If you are aiming for your own personal once-in-a-lifetime shot, these tips are sure to inspire.

Greg du Toit, international Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2013, is an expert at low-light photography. His winning photo of elephants, commended for its technical excellence and the unique moment it captures, beat almost 43 000 entries from 96 countries.

Greg has undertaken a personal project to photograph African leopards and, three years into it, he has become adept at harnessing the latest advances in digital cameras, specifically in the area of high ISO performance, to document the nightly forays of leopards. He shares a few tricks of nocturnal photography with *Wild*. Not only is it very



COLOUR

Managing colour when shooting at night can be difficult, because the spotlight is a warm light. But, your flash is a cold light, which means that the two combined can give very pleasing results. Setting your camera to AWB (auto white balance) is the safest and most effective way to shoot at night.

Nikon D3, 1/320 sec, f5.6, ISO 800, 400mm lens



Nikon D3S, 1/125 sec, f7.1, ISO 1000, 200-400mm lens



FLASH The flash can be a valuable tool in low-light photography, but when photographing predators you will get the dreaded 'green eye'. This is the equivalent of the red eye you get when shooting people at night. The solution is simple, purchase an off-camera flash cord and get that flash as far away from your camera as possible.

To take your photographic skills one notch higher, why not reserve a seat on a night drive? You may even want to book the entire safari vehicle if you are really keen and want to do your own thing without testing the patience of other passengers.

Photographing after dark presents unique challenges. "It is not only very technical," says Greg, "but every situation is different, requiring me to come up with my own recipe of manual settings that need constant tweaking."

Nature lovers will be glad to know that using a torch to illuminate a scene should not affect the animal's vision. "Animals such as leopards can easily cope with the differing contrast levels created by my torch," Greg explains. Nevertheless, spotlights should be switched off when an animal is hunting.

"An image I have desperately been searching for is one that captures the leopard in its nocturnal environment. I wanted an image that illustrates what its solitary life is like when cloaked in darkness. Finally, when my chance arose, I chose to switch my flash off and to include as much of the night around my subject as possible." 🐾

Greg du Toit specialises in fine art photography. He has a background in nature conservation and trails guiding.



Nikon D200, 1/160 sec, f5.6, ISO 200, 80-400mm lens



Nikon D300, 1/6 sec, f5.6, ISO 400, 80-400mm lens

GET THE SHOT

◀ **Depth of field** At night, a large depth of field is not required because there is usually no, or very little, background detail. The challenge is to get enough light onto your sensor, so shoot wide open. This is where those f2.8 lenses start to pay for themselves.

Contrast At night, the contrast levels are really very high due to the bright spotlight and surrounding darkness. There are two ways to handle this. Either set your aperture and shutter speed manually, starting at 1/250th of a second and f8, and tweak your ISO from there, or use your spot meter to take a reading off a highlight area of your subject and then lock it.

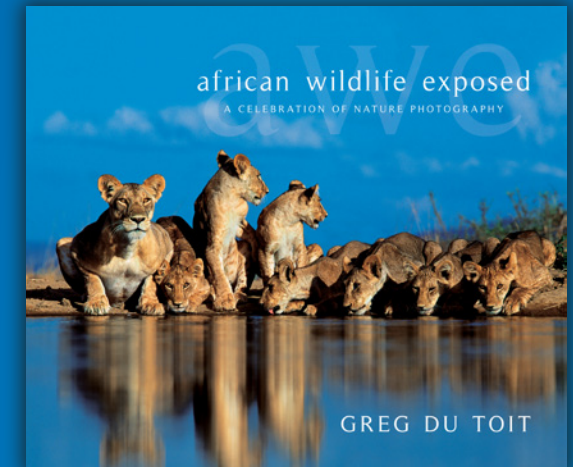
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"Every time a special wildlife photo is shared, an appreciation and love for wildlife increases. Eventually it will grow to a point where people will simply refuse to let these animals disappear."
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◀ **Motion blur** This technique conveys a sense of movement in a photograph. It's a very 'hit and miss' scenario as, to create blur, your shutter speed requirements vary greatly depending on the speed and distance of your subject. In time though, you will become good at guessing the correct speed, but to start off I suggest 1/45th of a second. Remember that you get 'motion blur' and then just 'blur', the latter is an accident!

awe

Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2013

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Acclaimed wildlife photographer Greg du Toit reveals Africa's wildlife in a way never before seen. This is an Africa where wild creatures roam the savannah plains, enchanting forests and dusty valley floors; a place where a tangible freedom, primal energy and a spirit of adventure still linger.

Greg was recently named the Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2013 in a prestigious competition run by BBC Wildlife and London's Natural History Museum.

