

SHARPENING YOUR *Wildlife* PHOTOGRAPHY SKILLS



CATCH THE ACTION

I look forward to watching the African lions when they greet each other. They will rub up against each other pressing solidly as they pass. The male gorilla will run and raise the alarm beating his chest; the grizzly bears will playfully wrestle, tumbling over one another. Animals are vibrant and moving and I try to capture the action when it's possible.



VISIT AT DIFFERENT TIMES, WEATHER AND SEASONS

Morning and evening are standard times to photograph, however, think in longer terms as well. Here in Denver, the different seasons can make for colorful fall backdrops or snowy photos that will make you shiver! Furthermore, changing weather conditions, such as stormy skies can make for more dramatic photos as well.



BLUR THE BACKGROUND

To create a less distracting background I will use a shallow depth of field allowing the subject to be in focus but blurring the background. This usually involves opening up your camera's aperture to its widest opening and shooting a faster shutter speed. Be sure to watch your focus as important subject features may get blurred. Your camera's depth of field button can come handy when adjusting for a focus range.

Another way to cut down on distracting backgrounds is to shoot from a lower angle and skyline the subject, using a blue sky or colorful fall colors to present a pleasing backdrop. Photograph as if the animal is on a pedestal.

AS ALWAYS, BE FLEXIBLE!

If an opportunity presents itself with beautiful lighting or a playful moment, photograph the animal even if you're not specifically looking for it. You never know when these types of photos will come in handy! Enjoy!

DAVE PARSONS IS THE STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER AND WEB MASTER AT THE DENVER ZOO.

HE WAS ALSO THE WINNER OF THE 2005 AZA PHOTO CONTEST.

What better place is there to photograph such an enormous variety of animal life in one place? Zoos and aquariums have animals from the rain forests, deserts, savannas, oceans and mountains from across the world. And we get to photograph them! However, with so many different animals, they all involve different shooting conditions making zoos and aquariums great places to sharpen those photography skills. Here are a few techniques I like to use.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DAVE PARSONS



LOOK FOR AN EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

Interaction between the photo and the viewer is key. Look to capture a moment of emotion between animals to stir a viewer's emotions.

Animals can be extremely curious and can show surprising tenderness towards one another. Animals know of aggression, playfulness, and care for their young greatly; you could say they have emotions and those emotions can be captured with the camera.

Likewise, there is so much non-verbal communication between animals that can be photographed. Good examples are mothers and offspring of many species, a playful pride of lions, grooming primates, wrestling bears and more.



USE THE WIDE-ANGLE LENS

Photographing animal life doesn't always require a long lens especially with many of the zoo exhibits today with their up-close viewing through glass. The effect of the wide lens can give the photographer some humorous effects, especially large noses! Be sure to watch for unnecessary distractions in the background, as there can be quite a bit of space to fill.

2006 AZA PHOTO CONTEST

Communiq   is holding a photography contest to highlight the best photography at AZA institutions in 2006. Photos need to be taken in 2006 and be from staff or volunteer at an accredited AZA institution. Animals depicted can be from the AZA institution or be animals involved in field projects of AZA institutions. *Communiq  * staff will judge the photos, and the winner will appear

on the December 2006 cover. Other exceptional photos will be highlighted inside the magazine. Submissions should include the name of the photographer, AZA institution, caption, date of picture and equipment used. Only one photo per photographer, so send in your best image. Pictures can include animals, people, and zoo or aquarium scenes – if you think it will make a good cover, send it in! To be considered for publication in *Communiq  *, photos that include people must be accompanied by a release signed by each person depicted. Release form can be found at <http://www.aza.org/AZAPublications/PhotoContest/>.

To be considered for the cover, electronic photos need to be TIFF or EPS files and be 300+ dpi and 9"x12" in size. E-mail electronic images to tlewthwaite@aza.org. Hard copies can be mailed to the address below. The deadline for submission is 16 September 2006. If you have any questions contact Tim Lewthwaite at (301) 562-0777 ext. 253 or by e-mail at tlewthwaite@aza.org.

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