



CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

Sports photographer turned wildlife specialist, David Yarrow is a leading light in the world of fine art, and he tells us exactly what motivates him to travel to some of the world's most isolated places

WORDS TERRY HOPE PICTURES DAVID YARROW

David Yarrow is a veritable breath of fresh air, answering a direct question with a direct answer and refusing to hide behind a wall of platitudes. Growing up in Glasgow he originally harboured dreams of becoming a professional footballer, golfer or swimmer, but gave up on this ambition when he discovered that he was, in his words, “crap at all of them. I decided that if I couldn’t play these sports then I would photograph them,” he says, “and I bought myself a Nikon FM-1 and a 4fps motor drive and dived in. In 1986 Scotland qualified for the World Cup in Mexico and I managed to get News International to send me out there and received a pitch pass accreditation from FIFA for the tournament.

“I stayed for the duration, and there is a custom that means all the countries involved can send representative photographers to the final itself. Since all of the Scottish photographers had headed home with the team some time before, I got the pass, and at the final whistle I was out there on the pitch, at 20 years old. As Maradona raised the cup above his head I took a picture of him that was half decent and it got used a lot. After that, Allsport – a major photographic agency that’s now part of Getty – took me under their wing, and I found myself working for them at the Winter Olympics in Calgary.”

Pressure from his parents meant David turned down a full-time job at Allsport, but despite pursuing other interests his passion for photography remained constant. By 2003 his horizons had changed and, following a

divorce, he visited some of the most remote places he could find. “It’s always been in my nature to head for far-flung spots,” he says. “If you were to give me the choice of travelling to Spain or Greenland, it would be Greenland every time.”

Eventually his images of unexplored ice formations, virgin beaches, untouched deserts and tiny fishing villages, gleaned from as far afield as Namibia and the Australian outback, were distilled into a book, *Nowhere*, and it marked a new direction in David’s life.

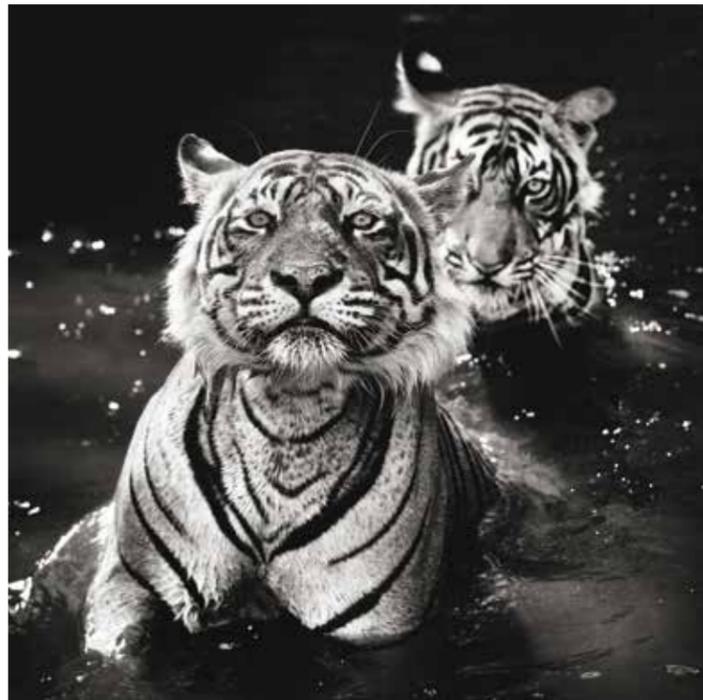
“In my opinion the pictures in any book fall into one of three categories,” says David. “They can be exceptional, good or fillers, and if you want to put a decent book out there then no more than a third of the pictures can be fillers.” David felt he had achieved his aim, but being painfully self-critical he still wasn’t fully satisfied. “There are some great pictures in there,” he says, “but I still feel that I could have done better.”

Moving into fine art

Realising that he needed to find some way to shoot the pictures he wanted without the restriction of a tight brief, David started to look around for solutions. One of his first thoughts was to focus on subjects that hadn’t been photographed to death, and he realised precious few decent images showed shark predation. “This was because it is so difficult to do,” says David. “You have to wait sometimes for hours for shark activity and you’re never sure where they might emerge. You could spend days looking for pictures and come away with nothing.” →

PREVIOUS White and black rhinos are highly endangered; these were in Kenya’s Lewa Wildlife Conservancy. **BELOW** Few images of shark predation have made their way into the media, and David’s incredible shot was the image that opened his eyes to wildlife photography. **RIGHT** One of David’s most successful pictures, this shot of a lioness was taken using a remote controlled camera and the animal was enticed by aftershave!





CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT This elephant bull in Kenya just managed to sidestep David's camera. With only 1,700 Royal Bengal tigers now in India, coming across this father and son together in the wild is truly awe-inspiring. This herd of Grevy's zebras in East Africa allowed David to get in close. Dignity, pride and grace: Suri villagers near the Sudanese border.

Convinced he was on to something, David headed to South Africa and hired a boat, and then spent days chasing his elusive pictures. "I would pre-focus on a group of seals and just wait," he says, "but I was getting nothing." Then, on his last day, the moment arrived: a shark seized a seal right in front of him, and he had the shot he'd envisaged.

Giving the image to an agency, it was quickly used by publications all around the world, opening David's eyes to the interest for pictures showing wildlife in a different and original light. It started him thinking about the potential for images that weren't necessarily destined merely for publication, but which could serve as fine art, beautifully presented as a limited edition.

Fine art photography perfectly matched David's own outlook. Other artists had helped to establish photography as a valuable commodity in its own right, and this would allow him to pursue those areas that naturally interested him and he could potentially educate his audience at the same time as appealing to their sense of the aesthetic.

He could focus on endangered or threatened creatures, promoting interest in their survival by sharing their natural beauty. He could also give something even more tangible

back by supporting those striving to make a difference, ensuring that the subjects would still be around for future generations. From the moment David made his decision to move into fine art photography he decided to find a partner that reflected his interests. The Tusk Trust, which funds conservation projects, community development and environmental education programmes across Africa, receives ten per cent of every sale David makes.

An individual approach

From the outset David made the decision to work with wide-angle lenses rather than the more conventional telephotos and to use remote triggers to obtain dramatic close-ups. Considering that his subjects were giant beasts with the potential to step on valuable cameras, or to carry gear off into the bush with them, he was taking a huge risk. But his tactics paid off, and he's produced

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some remarkable shots where the viewer finds themselves staring right into the eyes of the subject. David also made the choice to present his work in black & white.

"Primarily it's because this approach is timeless," he says. "The picture could almost have been taken 100 years ago: there's nothing to date it. I also feel that colour gives you too much information. If you strip this away then what you're left with is what is important in the picture, and that's what you focus on."

One of his most successful pictures to date features a lioness in the wildlife haven of Amboseli in the Rift Valley Province of Kenya, and David recalls the novel way he managed to encourage his subject to approach his remote camera. "I'd spent four mornings working with the same lion pride," he recalls. "After some unsuccessful mornings, we covered the camera casing in Old Spice stick aftershave, as my guide knew that lions were attracted to that smell (the local Masai, and indeed colonialists, have worn it for years). It worked, and the lioness came straight towards the camera against a clean backdrop."

In terms of his fine art print output David keeps his editions deliberately low, usually no more than 20. As the edition sells the price goes up, the reasoning being that the finite supply is running out. The last print in a series will sell for many times what the first print went for. "It's crucial that collectors know that they're getting something special," he says.

Artworks also have to look the part, and David uses BowHaus in Los Angeles to print his pictures. They also print for Nick Brandt, and they offer a bespoke look that matches David's vision. Framing is undertaken closer to home, by Genesis Imaging, in London, and the quality of the product has ensured a long-term relationship.

Proving that it's possible to forge a reputation as a highly collectable artist while still maintaining the lifestyle of a hard-working, much-travelled photographer, David continues to look for new challenges. He hopes that as well as supplying images that look amazing on the wall he will also be changing a few minds and making a fundamental difference along the way. **PP**



Starting his career shooting at the 1986 World Cup, David Yarrow now shoots wildlife photography in far-flung places, producing prestigious fine art black & white images of endangered animals.

MORE INFORMATION

www.davidyarrow.photography/
www.genesisimaging.co.uk

• David Yarrow's latest book is called *Encounter*, and it features 87 monochrome images from some of the harshest and most inaccessible places on earth. Published by Clearview, priced £60.

