

Issue 2 2019

# The Wild Lens

magazine for photographers

**Giraffe  
in NIGER**

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**Eagles rebound  
in AMERICA**

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**Gear for Puma  
in CHILE**

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**Dr. Jane  
GOODALL**

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**Publisher**

Michelle Liles

**Graphic Design**

Ki Bowman, M/O Graphics

**USA/Europe/Africa Editor**

Michelle Liles

**Asia Editor**

Ranjan Ramchandani

**Contributors**

Deby Dixon

John Ehrenfeld

Eric Grossman

Michelle Liles

Lori Lundin

Ranjan Ramchandani

Trikansh Sharma

Sean Viljoen

Katerina Gateva Wallace

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Eric Grossman

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**Publisher's Note**



Each morning when I wake up and have my coffee, I peruse social media for significant wildlife photography in hopes of viewing a noteworthy image. These visual representations are responsible for keeping the passion burning inside of me for the next wildlife adventure. There's always a beautiful animal in its environment or an interesting behavior to witness and inspire.

As any seasoned wildlife photographer knows, it takes an arsenal of gear, accessories and skill set to be able to shoot the photos that will hopefully capture that significant moment in natural history, along with its viewers' hearts. It also takes grit, talent and luck.

In my opinion, the contributors to *The Wild Lens* have created their luck. Spending hours, days and, in many cases, lifetimes in the field, they have increased their odds of capturing that perfect moment, often in difficult conditions and climates.

Please enjoy articles about a successful giraffe relocation project in Niger, Lori Lundin of NPR's interview of the renowned Dr. Jane Goodall, wildlife in Yellowstone National Park, elephants in India's Corbett National Park, following puma in Patagonia and a photographer profile of Ranjan Ramchandani. May your next adventure be inspired.

Michelle Liles  
[michelle@thewildlensmagazine.com](mailto:michelle@thewildlensmagazine.com)



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A night sky with the Milky Way galaxy visible, and a giraffe skull in the foreground. The sun is setting on the horizon, creating a warm glow. The skull is illuminated by a light source, possibly a lamp, highlighting its texture and features.

# The Silent Extinction

After a 50-Year Absence, Giraffe  
Successfully Relocated in Niger

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STORY AND PHOTOS BY SEAN VILJOEN

*“Wildlife is resilient and if we can create the conditions for ecosystems to thrive, then nature will do the rest.”*



In order to help safeguard their future, Giraffe Conservation Foundation and Sahara Conservation Fund partnered to attempt to safely reintroduce eight West African giraffe into Gadabedji Biosphere Reserve.

This reintroduction of giraffe to their former range in Niger aims to establish a second viable population of the subspecies in support of their conservation in a healthy and well-managed ecosystem.



Throughout the continent of Africa, giraffe numbers have plummeted in the last three decades – a state of affairs that has been referred to as a “silent extinction”. Pressures including habitat loss and fragmentation, civil unrest and illegal hunting have reduced giraffe to less than 100,000 animals in all of Africa. In the mid-1990s there were only 49 West African giraffe left in the wild, with the entire population residing 60 kilometres from Niamey, the capital city. Conservation efforts by the Government of Niger, in collaboration with local and international partners, have triggered an amazing recovery of the West African giraffe population to over 600 individuals today.





With the goal set, the team tackled preparations for the many logistical challenges that would stand in the way of making this vision a reality. Transporting eight giraffe a distance of over 800 kilometres safely is quite a specialised task to accomplish in a remote corner of the world, with limited resources. However, African ingenuity and the ability to “make a plan” are wonderful things. With the full support of the Nigerian military, the team was able to make all necessary preparations for the capture to begin.

Eight giraffe were individually captured and transferred to a holding pen, where they were kept for more than three weeks to prepare them for the long journey. This habituation process was aimed at gradually exposing the animals to human presence to help reduce the stress of the arduous journey ahead. Eventually the time arrived and the eight giraffe were then transported to their new home in two groups of four, a taxing journey for both the giraffe and the team. It took 48 hours to cover the 800 kilometres to Gadabedji Biosphere Reserve, requiring constant alertness from the team to monitor the animals’ stress levels and watch for overhanging obstacles and uneven surfaces.



All eight of the giraffe arrived safely and this is the first conservation effort of its kind in Niger, and for West African giraffe. This new seed populations ends an absence of the species from the area of nearly 50 years. Projects like these represent hope for conservation through providing integrated solutions to the

challenges faced by Africa. In a continent that is forecast to be required to support an additional billion people by 2050, the future of wildlife is precarious. Yet projects that create the right incentives to protect wildlife, and grow community custodianship for these natural resources, light the path forward.



*“Projects that...grow community custodianship for these natural resources light the path forward.”*



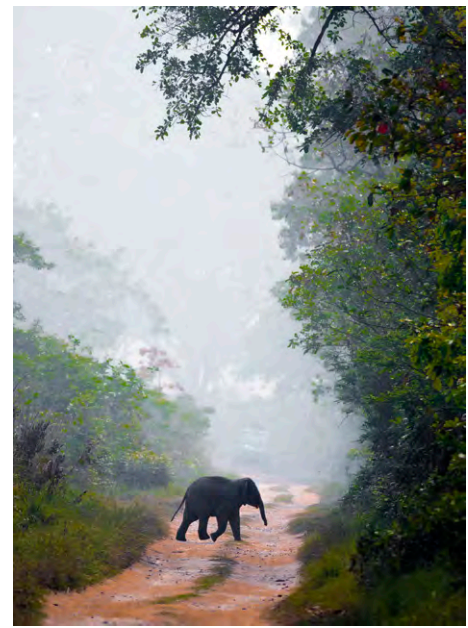
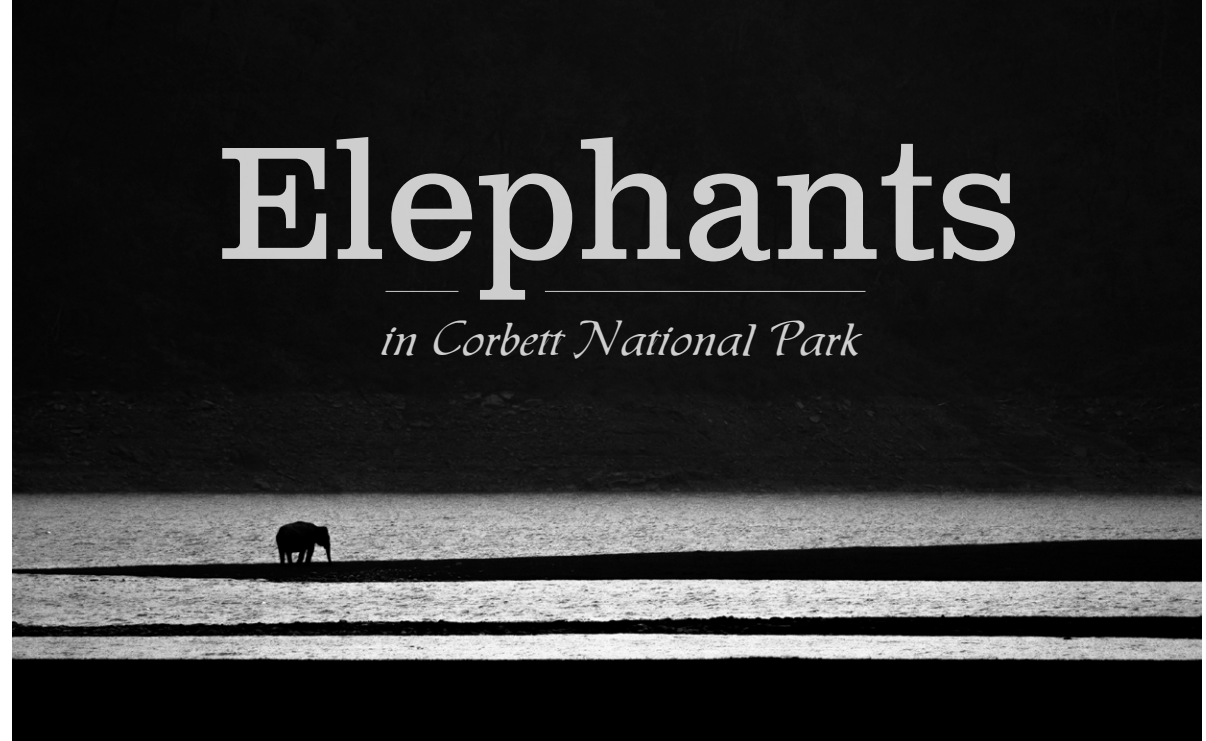


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We work with talented filmmakers from around the world to share the stories of dedicated conservationists on the frontline. When considering the statistics on the rates of biodiversity loss and the multitude of growing threats from climate change to ever expanding human populations, it paints a fairly dire picture for wild places. Film is a medium that has the power to spread a message by getting the general public to engage with these issues, all the while begging the question, "Where does hope for conservation lie?"

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## THE COMEBACK OF

# America's Bird

"In an eagle there is all the  
wisdom of the world."

— Lame Deer



Majestic and revered, the bald eagle is considered a symbol of pride and dignity to Americans. To be able to see one in the wild is a glorious and transcendent experience that for some people signifies freedom, strength and self-determination. Eagles can be easily distinguished by their bright white head and tail and have incredibly wide wingspans of up to eight feet. Like many birds of prey, eagles are monogamous. Eagle life expectancy can approach 25-30 years in the wild. They build very large nests, (a mature nest can often weigh more than a ton) near the top of tall trees, often near water. They are very terri-

torial and typically use the same nest every year, adding branches and soft nesting materials each fall prior to breeding season.

The female lays her first egg five to ten days after mating, then the eggs are incubated for approximately 35 days. After the juveniles fledge at about 12 weeks of age, they travel thousands of miles exploring and usually return to live within 100 miles of their natal nests when they reach sexual maturity, which is five years of age. At that time they look for a mate and begin breeding.

Ben Franklin argued against eagles being designated as the national sym-

bol, opting instead for the wild turkey.

*"I wish the Bald Eagle had not been chosen as the representative of our country; he is a bird of bad moral character; like those among men who live by sharping and robbing, he is generally poor, and often very lousy."*

Thankfully, good old Ben lost this one and in 1782 the bald eagle was chosen as the emblem of the United States of America, many agree, because of a long lifespan, great strength and majestic presence.

However, we almost lost them forever. Found only on the North American continent, bald eagles were once numerous and abundant.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JOHN EHRENFELD



It was estimated there were between 300,000 and 500,000 in the late 1700's. But, by the turn of the last century, our national symbol was close to extinction. In 1965, there were less than 30 nesting pairs of bald eagles remaining. This precipitous drop in the eagle population was due to the intrusion of man, widespread development, the destruction of critical and safe habitat, eagle hunting and, most insidiously, the insecticide DDT (dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane) which poisoned eagle food sources.

DDT, often considered the primary cause of the bald eagle population's demise, is a chemical which had widespread use. DDT would accumulate in the tissue of wildlife, often winding up being ingested by apex predators such as eagles and other carnivores. This extremely toxic insecticide interfered with an eagle's ability to produce strong eggshells and the shells became so thin they would often break open during the incubation process. This was devastating to population stability and over time caused a precipitous drop in the numbers of eagles in the wild.

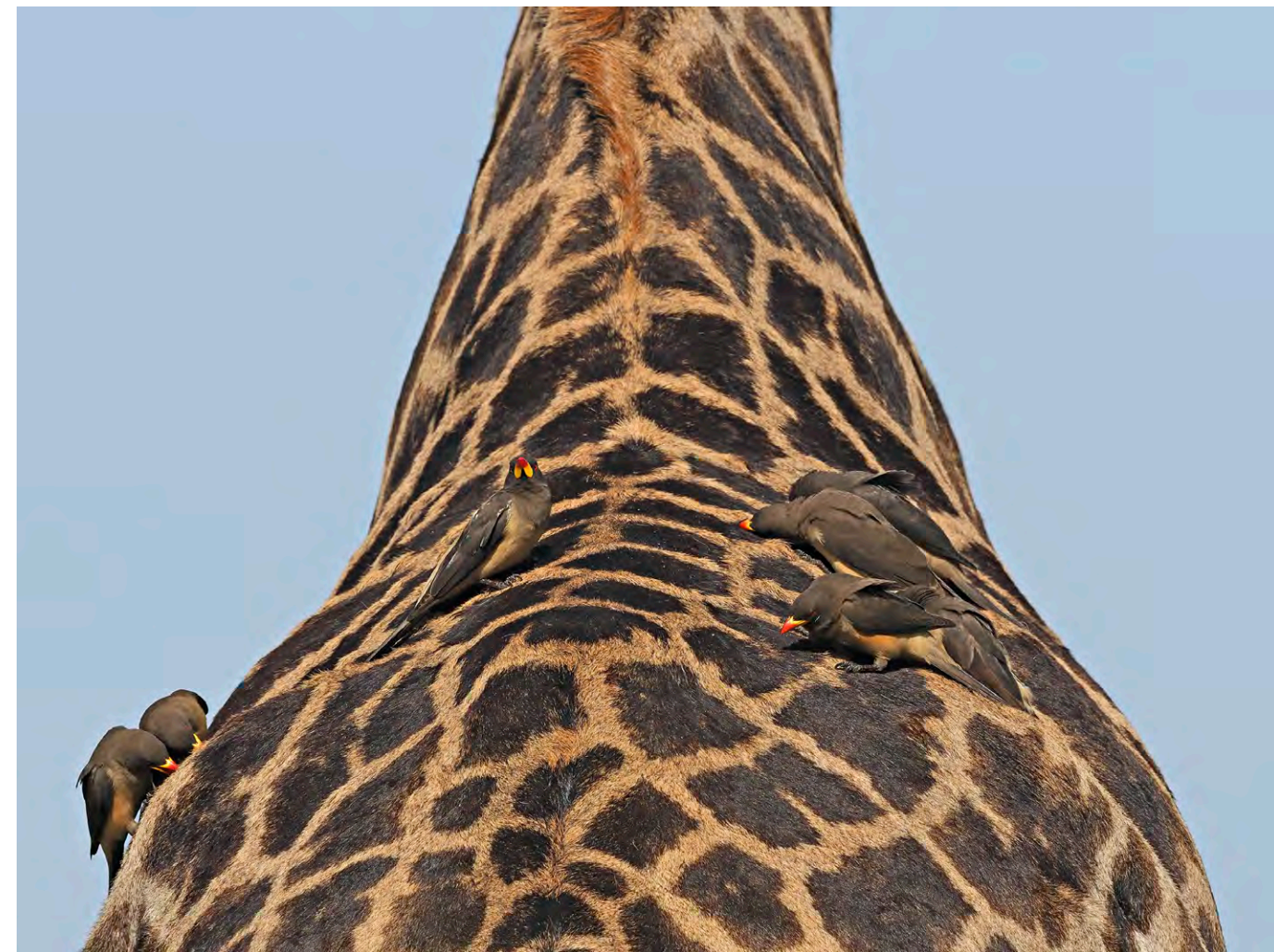
*Silent Spring*, an acclaimed environmental science book written by Rachel Carson in 1962, detailed the destructive effects of pesticides like DDT on nature. This iconic work informed millions as to the danger of such poisons and the lengths to which the profitable chemical industry went to lie and distort their effects. In 1967 bald eagles were finally accorded federal protection, and in 1972 the United States banned the use of DDT.

Since then, due to the heroic efforts of many dedicated wildlife biologists, scientists and volunteers throughout the country, bald eagles have seen a remarkable and inspir-

ing recovery nationwide. How did that happen? Structurally weakened eggs laid by the birds and affected by DDT were painstakingly replaced with artificial wooden eggs, often in hard-to-reach locations. The adult eagles unknowingly continued to incubate the artificial eggs while the real ones were incubated at remote facilities. Chicks that hatched from these eggs, or those produced by other captive adult eagles from Alaska and British Columbia, were then carefully placed back into their nests in the wild along with their eggshells. The eagles who had been incubating the wooden eggs willingly took over rearing the young. Some would argue that they were "fooled for their own good". After refining this process over time, more and more eagles were successfully hatched and fledged this way. Over time the eggshells hardened naturally and things began to return to normal. Eagles that were orphaned, injured or fell from their nests were raised in hacking towers, artificial cages built on platforms in the wild that were carefully constructed to mimic their natural nests. Here they were fed and cared for and learned how to survive in the wild.

In 2007, bald eagles were removed from the endangered species list when the population reached nearly a thousand pairs according to U.S. Fish and Wildlife. There are now more than 5,000 nesting couples with a total of more than 70,000 bald eagles in North America.

Hopefully we have learned from history. If you are fortunate enough to experience the elation and joy that comes with seeing these extraordinary, fearless birds soaring freely in the wild, you may learn to appreciate the delicate balance that exists between man and wildlife and be inspired to help preserve the species.



# LOSING THE WEIGHT

Moving from a DSLR to an MFT Mirrorless System

Photos and Story by Ranjan Ramchandani

I feel extremely lucky to have had the opportunity to engross myself in technology ever since I picked up my first twin-lens reflex camera at the age of six. I was one of those photographers who went through all of the various systems until we reached the DSLR revolution; it is here

where I thought technology and art had truly found symbiosis.

To me, the glass has always been the most important piece of equipment in my bag, and this is one important decision any photographer should make before deciding on which



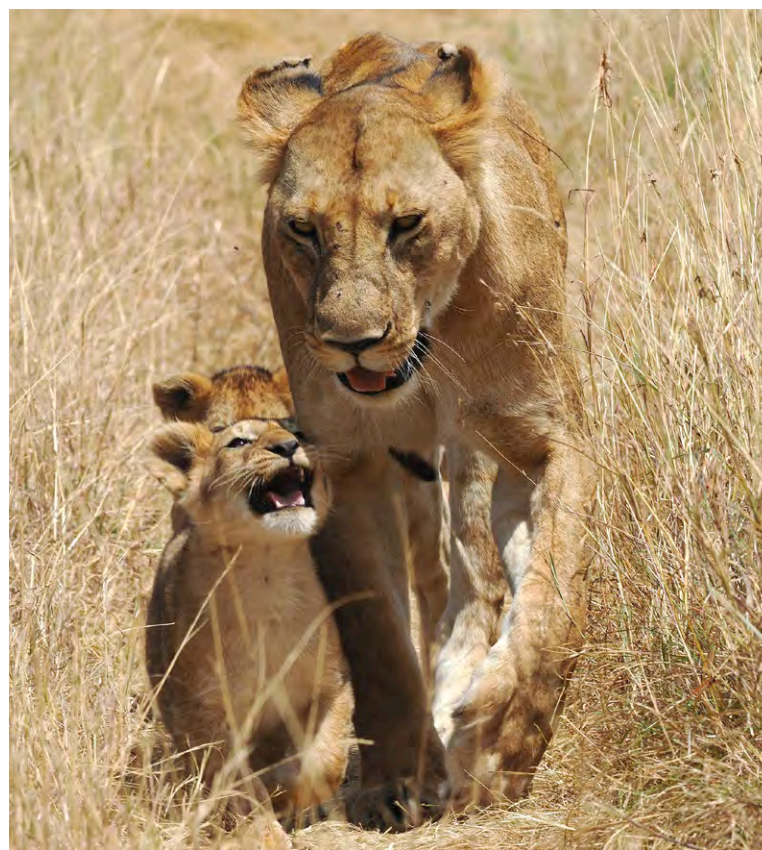
brand of equipment to buy, as lenses are expensive with a poor resale value. In my opinion, in the DSLR range, the best glass at the time was being made by Canon; they also had an amazing range which would allow me to cover everything from the streets to wildlife and I had built a collection of them over the years. I was so enthralled by my own equipment that I stopped seeing what developments were being made in technology, until one day my health stepped in and told me that I needed to slow down and stop carrying such heavy weight around with me. The issue was my lower back and cervical; they both began to feel the strain of carrying heavy equipment, which was something I had been doing in pursuit of my passion for wildlife photography. I was very happy as I had a few awards under my belt from images I had captured using this system, and wanted to build on it. However, it was simply not worth taking the risk of walking around with such weight anymore. I had to start looking for better options.

Then came the day I found myself bedridden for weeks, which gave me time to rethink what I would do, as carrying heavy equipment was out of the question entirely. I started to research the mirrorless system, which was truly an eye opener. I read up on and checked out a lot of equipment that was available in the market, and after about a year of preliminary testing, concluded that I needed to move to the “micro four-thirds system”. There

was no point in going mirrorless unless I could take advantage of lighter lenses, which was only possible if I gave up the “full frame” range, even what existed in the mirrorless category. After careful consideration and far more research, I decided to seek out the best set of glass in the mirrorless category, only to find that the brand I had gone for initially, Olympus, had two very good MFT camera systems to go with the glass.

I was delighted to find that the MFT system from Olympus gave me two completely different professional bodies and a complete set of pro lenses covering a range from 7 mm f2.8 (equivalent to 14mm in the FF format) all the way to 300 mm f4 (Equivalent to 600mm in the FF format) and a 1.4x converter. I am currently looking forward to the 150-400 mm Pro Lens with built in 1.25 x converter and the additional 2x converter to hit the market. As a wildlife photographer, I feel the range of 300mm all the way to a 2000mm “handheld” in one lens is a huge advantage over any FF DSLR or mirrorless system. Shooting with a light weight system that is also handheld is one of the key reasons that I always recommend an MFT system.

I was approached by some fellow photographers who are still using their FF DSLRs, and they pointed out to me that when they expand my images on their computers, the



images ‘pixilate’. My answer to that was, and remains, that I capture images to see them as art in their entirety as well as to print, not necessarily to dissect. One should always compare prints before making any decisions on whether or not they like the output of a system. In my case, I found that the difference was negligible, even to a professional eye, and it has not affected my print sales in any way. I wouldn’t say that an MFT system is a replacement to a FF DSLR system per se, but it is definitely worth having it as a parallel to one. I personally found that my Olympus system performed exactly the tasks I wanted, both for my wildlife and street work and I have moved 100% to it. Now I can carry two bodies (OM-D E M-1 MK II and the OM-D E-M1X), a 7-14mm, 12-100 mm, 40-150mm, 300 mm, 45mm, 25mm and a couple more lenses in a backpack and walk around for large periods of time comfortably.

In short, here are my fundamental reasons for the switch from a FF DSLR to the MFT mirrorless system and why I personally feel that fellow professionals should consider having investing in a parallel MFT system, if not a primary one.

–System weight and size. The Olympus bodies are much smaller and lighter than a FF DSLR system, which leads to smoother travel and smaller bags.

–The 5 axis in-body stabilisation makes it so easy to shoot hand held. (I would even say they have made the tripod seem irrelevant).

–Handheld shooting allows for so much flexibility in terms of framing.

–This system gives me 18 fps with continuous focusing and tracking which is something I hadn’t had before.

–Pro-capture (which buffers the minute you start focusing, therefore never missing the initial action shot—which one usually does due to a human reaction time lag) is really unique about this system.

–The weatherproofing of my mirrorless system has turned out to be far superior to any DSLR I have used thus far. Additionally, the camera has performed well in all conditions, no matter how harsh they have been. This is reflected in its colour powers in both water and snow.

–I find that the image clarity is second to none.

# Taking Your Best Shot

Why Gear Rental Can Be the Smarter Choice

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*After a difficult 52-hour journey to Chile from the U.S.A. I was locked and loaded, ready to photograph, full of excitement, passion and, most importantly, the proper photographic gear.*

---

Story & Photos by Michelle Liles

In the stark and harsh, yet beautiful foothills near Torres del Paine National Park, Patagonia, Chile, roam one of the most stunning creatures to inhabit our planet: the majestic puma.

“Pumaland” at Torres del Paine is a 200-square-kilometer tract of rolling, grassy hills. It is considered to be the only place in the world where pumas can ‘potentially’ be seen on a daily basis. These cats are visible thanks to decades of protection from hunting combined with a uniquely high density of their favorite prey, guanacos, and hares. Traveling there to potentially capture their “paw prints”, I needed to rent some photographic equipment. The cats would be far away and moving quickly and my gear would not be able to handle that.

I contacted [www.lensrentals.com](http://www.lensrentals.com) about renting the gear that I would need to augment my photographic arsenal and be prepared to capture the remarkable pumas behind my lens. [Lensrentals.com](http://Lensrentals.com) had many offerings in the way of camera bodies, lenses, extenders, tripods; really anything you would need. Prime lenses, (the kind that offer great focal length,) are very expensive to purchase, so renting is a viable option. You can test before you buy.



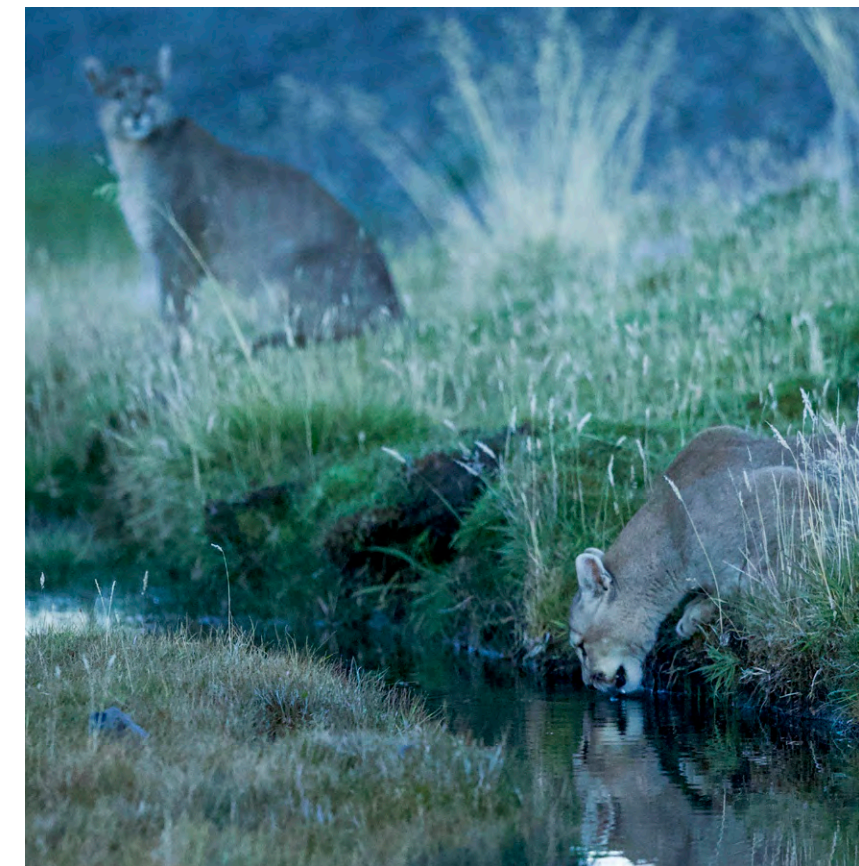


I personally photograph with Canon gear, and [lensrentals.com](https://www.lensrentals.com) offers up to 800mm focal length. I decided to rent the 600mm and a 2x extender. I also rented the Canon 1DX body, which offers 18.1 megapixels and up to 51200 ISO. If you are a Nikon user, similar specs would be available to you along with brands like Sigma, Sony, Leica, and Olympus.

After a difficult 52-hour journey to Chile from the U.S.A. I was locked and loaded to photograph, full of excitement, passion, and most importantly, the proper photographic gear. On the first morning of the tour, our experienced guides spotted a pair of puma sisters, sleeping in the glowing morning backlight. Tears of joy formed in my eyes and I knew I had to get there before they moved away. Carrying a tripod and a pack of photographic gear, I marched up the hill panting and sweating. The first to arrive at the scene, I placed my 600mm lens and body on the tripod and began to click my shutter. The focal length with the extender was perfect and I could garner 12-frames-a-second with the body. As the sisters moved across the landscape, stopping to drink at a puddle, light illuminated their fur, making them seem otherworldly.

I realized quickly, these ladies could move rapidly and I would have to work quickly to capture them effectively. Luckily, the lens had the image stabilization feature. We followed them for probably a mile, then changed to a wider angle lens (a 16-35mm) to capture the spectacular Torres del Paine mountain scenery behind them. We had a moment where the cats passed directly in front of us just a few feet away, too close to capture in the lens; that's a moment every wildlife photographer should experience.

One the second day, we saw a gorgeous young male with a beautiful face that dazzled. He was a bit more elusive than the sisters had been, so having the 600mm focal length came in handy to garner a close portrait shot. We did see our sisters again and followed them along the lakeshore, stunning azure blue backgrounds. As the days progressed, the captivating cats and breathtaking landscapes began to steep into my soul. Probably my favorite moment of the trip was when one of the sisters, Petaka, climbed on a ledge with the sparkling sapphire water behind her. I quickly realized I had a special moment on my hands, and circled around to capture the right angle.



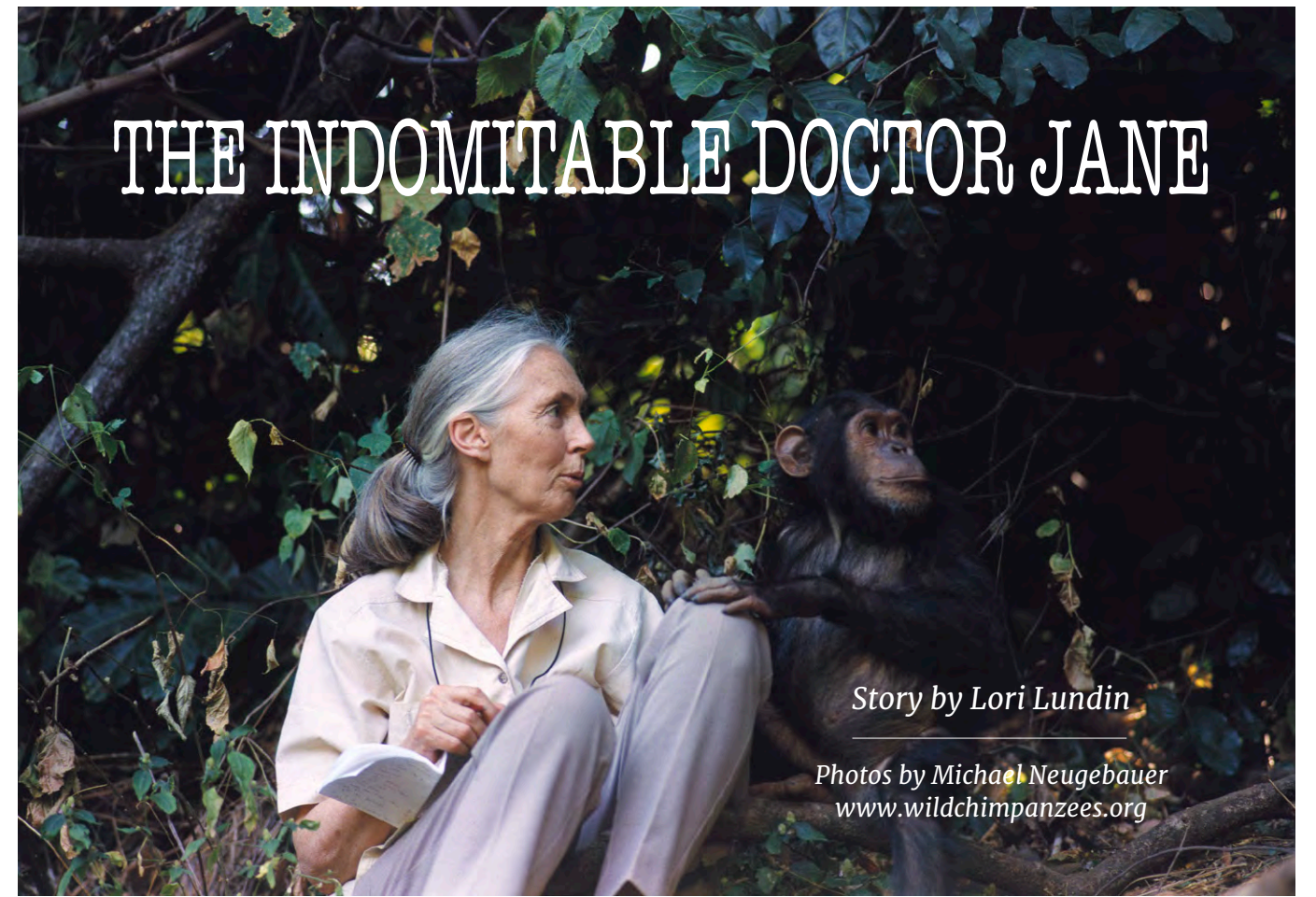




On day three, it seemed like the nature gods came together to assist us in our quest. There had been a sighting of a sister and brother so we trekked up a hillside to photograph. At the top of the ridge was one of my idols, Art Wolfe, the famous wildlife photographer. All of us, Art included, followed the cats on their journey and they ended up drinking out of an effervescent pool of water. As night approached, we were losing the valuable light necessary to capture the unique moment, and the ISO capability of the camera really came in handy. The encounter of seeing the cats' mirror images in the water had me "reflecting" on my own life a bit. As a crowning end to the day, the male, Rayo, climbed onto a hillside, with a crescent moon just above his head. We had a wonderful time trying to garner the silhouette of the cat along with the moon. It was truly a serendipitous encounter.

Torres del Paine National Park is known around the world for its soaring mountains, bright blue icebergs and golden pampas (grasslands) that shelter the rare wildlife. The lensrentals.com gear allowed me to effectively capture the special moments and encounters with the distinctive wildlife from this magical journey. The enchanting pumas and epic Patagonian landscapes are a trek every wildlife photographer should consider. I am already dreaming of another expedition and maybe renting the 800mm lens from lensrentals.com!

# THE INDOMITABLE DOCTOR JANE



Story by Lori Lundin

Photos by Michael Neugebauer  
www.wildchimpanzees.org

“More and more often I found myself thinking, ‘This is where I belong. This is what I came into this world to do.’”

- DR. JANE GOODALL

In my career as a journalist, I have done thousands of interviews that have included famous actors, politicians and a former president. This one made me feel like a “star struck” groupie. Dr. Jane Goodall is arguably one of the most impactful humans on this planet. I love her! A pioneer environmental activist, United Nations Messenger of Peace, and at times a voice for the “voiceless”. One of Time Magazine’s 100 most influential people of 2019, she has left an indelible mark on my life and millions around the world. It is no wonder my angst over interviewing Jane Goodall carried over into writing this piece. What words would possibly do her justice?

## The Interview

I spoke to Goodall last year ahead of the premiere of the National Geographic documentary “Jane”, a mesmerizing window into her time in the Gombe National Park in Tanzania. This is where her life’s work began, studying the then-unknown world of wild chimpanzees on a very personal level.

Using 60-year-old archived footage filmed by Goodall’s late husband Hugo van Lawick, NatGeo provides an intimate look at a barefooted 26-year-old Jane in the forest; living and learning about our closest living relatives. Because of her research, we now know that they, like us, have a complex society with unique individuals with strong family bonds who express themselves with hugs, kisses and pats on the back. Goodall is the only person ever accepted into a wild chimpanzee community and she is keenly aware of what privilege that was. “It was so amazing, gradually getting to know them with all their vivid personalities and quirks and behaviors, good mothers and bad mothers, intelligent males and less intelligent ones and all of that. They were amazing times.” Hearing this, I cannot help wonder if she misses being there. Goodall says she gets back to Gombe twice a year for a few days, but she does not venture into the forest. At this point in her life, the



terrain is, unfortunately, too steep and rugged. “But you know, I have all those memories, and nothing can take them away. And this film (“Jane”) brings it back so vividly, those best days of my life.”

Now, at this time in history, she feels her focus needs to be elsewhere. At the age of 85, Goodall feels a sense of urgency; for our planet and for the time she has left to use her voice as a call to action. She spends 300 days a year traveling around the globe raising awareness about the critical need for conservation, the inherent rights of all sentient beings and the importance that we humans understand our own interconnectedness.

#### Future Changemakers

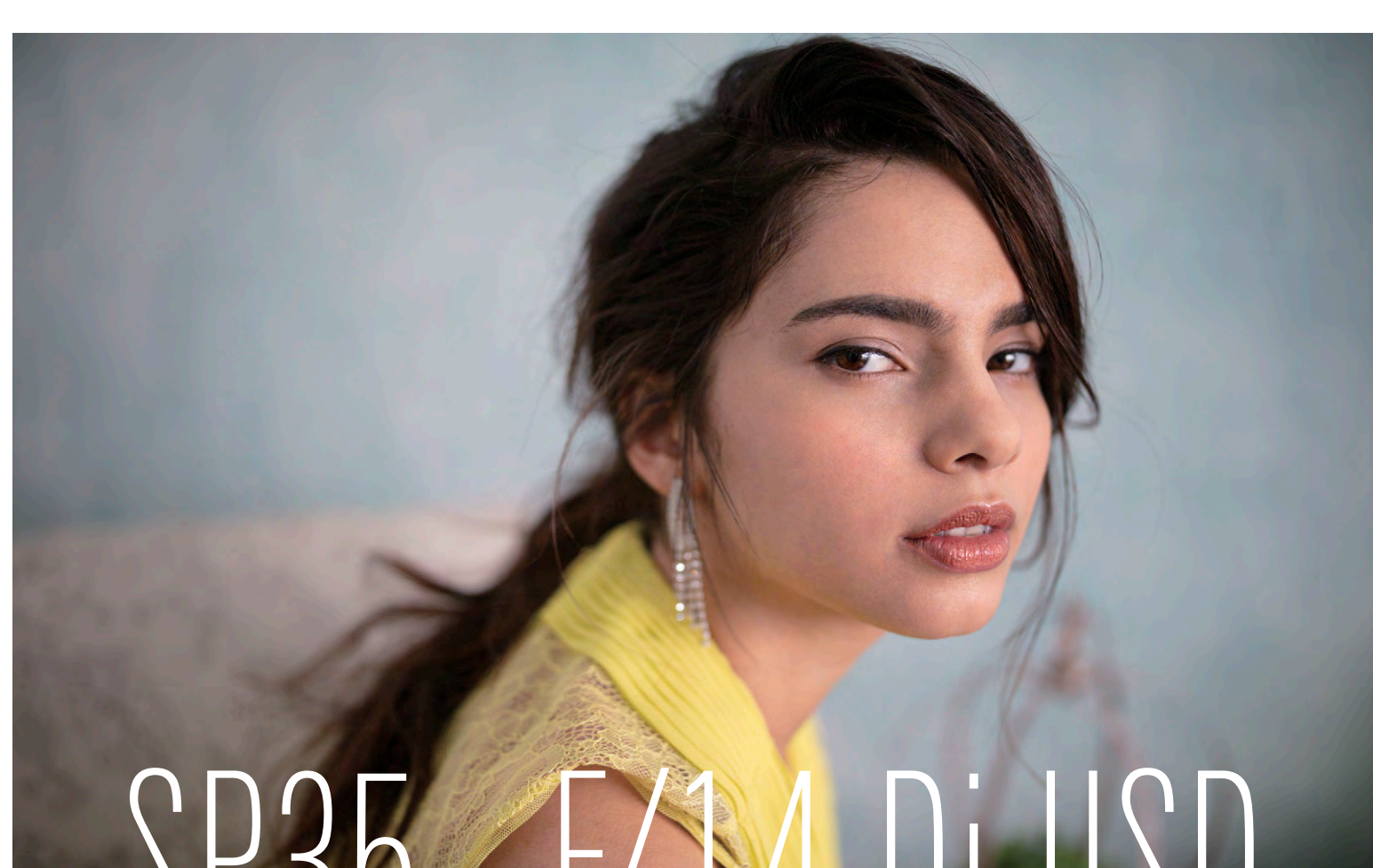
Goodall sees the next generation as the real hope. Her Roots and Shoots program, started in 1991, helps young people understand the importance of respecting wildlife and nature. The program is now in over 100 countries, with an estimated 100,000 active groups. “When young people know the problem and we listen to their voices and empower them to take action, they just roll up their sleeves and they get out there. So, the aim is to create a critical mass of young people who understand that yes, we need money to live. It goes wrong when we live for money.”

Jane Goodall’s research transformed our understanding of chimpanzees, a species who share 99 percent of our DNA structure. I asked what we might learn from all these similarities. She preferred to talk about what sets us apart. “I think it’s the explosive development of our intellect. Which makes it absurd that being the most intellectual being on the planet, that we are destroying our only home. It is crazy. Just for greed, we are caught up in this materialistic society that bases success on how much money you make and how much power you have.” She made it clear that she feels we must now use our so-called “explosive intellect” to fix what we have broken.

#### Be The Change. Be Like Jane

For us lovers of wilderness, the daily barrage of news stories about the ominous threats facing our planet can feel overwhelming. A recent UN report, warning that a million species are at risk of extinction within decades due to human activity, can seem like too much to comprehend. Listening back to my conversation with this soft-spoken powerhouse of a human being feels emotional and personal to me. Her life’s work is a reminder that silence is NOT golden. “We just have to make our voices heard. I think one thing interesting is that social media, though it can be used for really bad purposes, nevertheless, we now have a way of bringing voices together from all over the world.” Still, I cannot help wonder how she stays hopeful amid all of these threats. “Nature is amazingly resilient. All around Gombe in the early nineties, the hills were bare and now they are all covered again in forest because we worked with the local people and they set land aside. Everywhere I go, I meet the most incredible people doing amazing things; things that a while back might have been thought impossible, like restoring nature to areas that we have totally destroyed.” She continues, “And then everywhere I go, there are young people with shining eyes wanting to tell Dr. Jane what they’re doing, what they’ve been doing and what they plan to do to make the world better for people, for animals and for the environment.”

Goodall has no plans of stopping the work of making her own voice heard. “So, I will go on traveling around the world and growing this program for youth to give them hope. Because, if we lose hope then that is the end. If you don’t have hope, there’s no point in doing anything.” Then with a chuckle, she adds, “So that’s what I plan to do, but I have not the remotest idea how long my body will continue to function. None of us know, do we?” Her deepest hope is that we carry her legacy forward by doing all we can to protect this beautiful planet and all of its inhabitants.



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