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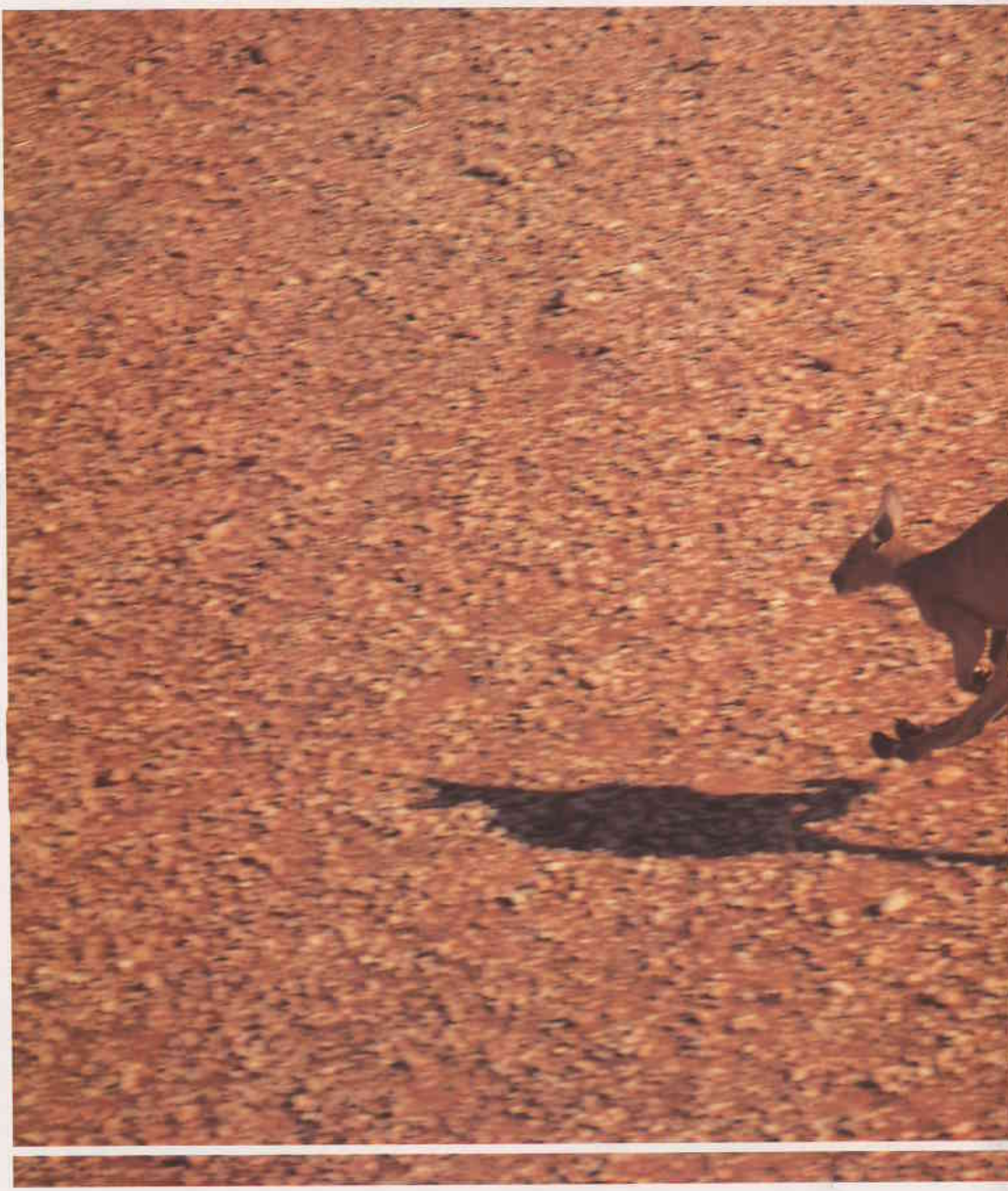

MY LENS

by
Jiri Lochman

What makes a good wildlife photograph?

LANDSCOPE has often been praised for the quality of its pictures, and many readers will have noticed that a few photographers' names crop up regularly in each issue. This is no accident - the work of this small band of camera artists is outstanding.

One of *LANDSCOPE*'s regular photographers is Jiri Lochman. This is Jiri's account of what motivates him to take wildlife photographs.

THE Australian bush offers a feast of visual experience. For me, it nurtures a desire to share what I see with others. From this desire it's only a short step to wildlife photography.

The biggest task of any wildlife photographer is to open this sometimes unfamiliar world to those who are interested, and who, for various reasons, may not be able to experience it first hand. Wildlife photography plays a major role in the conservation of endangered species. For example, few people may have seen the giant panda but, thanks to photography, most of us know what it looks like. Without this change of the unknown into the familiar, motivating sufficient interest to save threatened animals would be difficult, if not impossible.

One of the first questions I am usually asked is, what equipment do I use? It may disappoint the technically minded to find I don't use any overly sophisticated gadgetry, and I am invariably behind the camera when it is triggered. Most of my wildlife pictures are taken with 35 mm Nikon gear. My favourite lens is the 105 mm micro Nikkor, which allows me to photograph a wide range of subjects, from insects to landscapes.

Of course, an indispensable part of photography is light. The ability to read light, the way it changes through the day, and how it lights a subject from different angles is what makes a photographer. I prefer available light to artificial illumination, but not at the price of dragging nocturnal animals out of their burrows. Since Australia abounds with nocturnal creatures, I use flash of some sort in roughly one third of all wildlife pictures I take. However, even under poor lighting conditions, I would often risk losing a shot completely rather than restricting myself to flash photography.

I rely more on my knowledge of animals and their behaviour than on my equipment. The more I learn about wildlife - not in a purely scholarly sense - the more rewarding every new encounter is. By trial and error I have found it results in a higher success rate if I allow animals to approach me of their own accord, rather than trying to outmanoeuvre them. I learnt long ago that there are no quick results in wildlife photography. If it's instant results you're after, you would be better off doing something else. By my whole approach, I strive to capture animals in their environment, recording the way they live without disturbing them.

There is a fundamental irony in trying to promote the cause of wildlife by producing pictures of stressed-looking creatures that were handled, cornered or otherwise restrained. I became a wildlife photographer because of my love of nature, and over the years I have developed my own code of ethics. It is that *none of my pictures is more important than the well- being of the subjects I photograph*. The tangible results of this philosophy are images of lively looking animals going unrestricted about their business. Luckily, what is best for the animal usually proves best for photography - at least the photography that I and most of my clients prefer.

In this small cross-section of my work, I have attempted to give an insight into how and, perhaps more importantly, why I took the particular photograph. If, as is often the case, I spend a long time on a shot, I can become quite attached to the subject. I observe and get to know its character. Sometimes I might even give it a nickname.

The angle of illumination is of utmost importance not only for determining the exposure, but also for the final effect. The little egret that caught a shrimp in a stream running through the tidal mud is photographed into the sun. To get this image I used a 600 mm telephoto lens and Fujichrome 50 film.◂

I try to capture animals in the most intimate moments of their lives. Here, the slender tree frog - nicknamed in this picture the 'wobbly frog'- had difficulty getting onto a twig. Since most Australian frogs are active at night, I had to use a pair of flashes coupled with a 105 mm micro-lens; the film was Kodachrome 64.◂▾

Insect photography is a hobby within my profession. It has two advantages, especially for leisure-time photographers. It offers inexhaustible variations, and it can be performed almost everywhere, for example in your back yard or in city parks from which most other wildlife long ago disappeared.

In the first example, a spider-hunter wasp feeds from a foxglove. This picture was taken on Kodachrome 64 film with a 105 mm micro-lens with extension tubes and a pair of small flashes. The picture of the lesser wanderer probing a bachelor's button was taken with available light, a 200 mm micro-lens and extension tubes. ▲▲

Anyone who has observed a splendid dragon lizard will testify to the peculiar positions in which it can suddenly stop. This magnificent dragon (*Diporiphora superba*) stopped only for a couple of seconds, just long enough for me to take this frame. Fujichrome 50 film and a 200 mm micro-lens were used with available light. ▸

Naturalist photographers tend to place value on photographs according to the rarity of the subject. Personally, I think rarity on its own does not make a picture, and would rather look at a well-executed photograph of a common creature than a poor picture of an endangered one. This picture of a feeding western grey kangaroo was taken with the last light of the day. For this reason I chose Ektachrome 100-plus film coupled with a 200 mm lens.▲

All but two native Australian small-to-medium-size mammals are nocturnal. To capture this golden-backed tree-rat I used Kodachrome 64 film and a 200 mm lens accompanied by a single flash mounted off the camera.▲▲

Some venomous snakes are the most secretive of all our native fauna. I have often heard wildlife photographers saying it is impossible to photograph snakes without catching them. I don't agree. The secret is to see the snake before it sees you. The bardick in this picture was photographed, without ever being handled, on Kodachrome 64 film with a 105 mm micro-lens and a pair of flashes.◀◀

Every wildlife photographer strives to have pictures of lively looking animals. This is particularly difficult to achieve with the echidna, since its minute eyes, usually held close to the ground, are either not seen in pictures or look flat, as if the animal was blind. To avoid that, I followed this echidna without disturbing it until it began crossing a fallen log. To add a spark into its eyes I used a fill-in flash with a 200 mm lens on Kodachrome 64 film.◀

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In the central Kimberley, a screw-pine-surrounded creek - just one of the threatened areas in this fragile frontier. Turn to page 22.

Until 1984 more was known about what was underneath the Nullarbor than what was on top. But with such a vast area to study, where do we start? See page 16.

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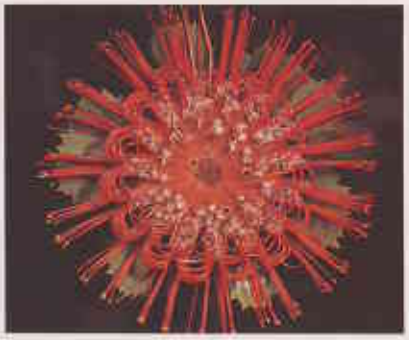

Public awareness and involvement is vital in the conservation of WA's rare and endangered flora. Page 49.

Ten WA mammal species have become extinct in the last 200 years. What can be done to ensure no more are lost forever? Page 28.

Forests protect our environment. They also provide timber. How do we strike a balance? Turn to page 35.

FEATURES

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SPECIALS

COVER

Dolphins and whales are perhaps the best-known inhabitants of Western Australia's coastal waters. But this unique area is also home to an astonishing range of marine flora and fauna, from sea-turtles and coral reefs in the north to sea-grass banks and great white sharks in the south. See page 10.

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