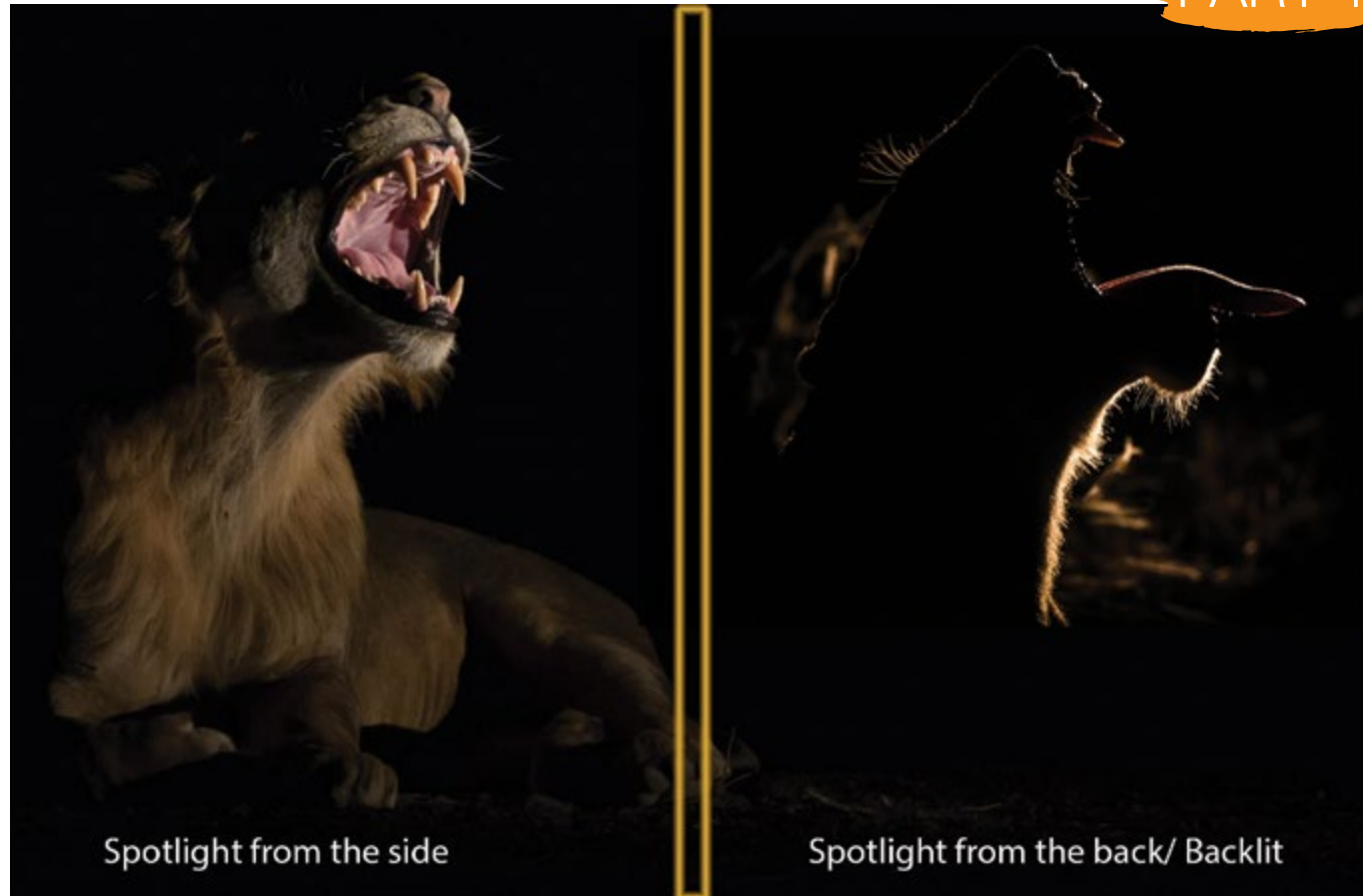


Guiding & WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY

[PHOTO / WRITER: Peter Geraerds]

PART 1



Spotlight from the side

Spotlight from the back/ Backlit

Do you need a photographic guide or a regular safari guide?

With both, you will get great wildlife sightings and be able to stay in comfortable accommodation with good food. I have found though that there are two different kinds of guests: the ones who will be up before the birds start singing, keen to make the most of the early morning light and the ones that want to lay in and enjoy the river view from the balcony with a cup of coffee. This is the same for the late afternoon or evening drive, the light will be very interesting again, but most regular safari guides find a nice spot with a view somewhere and pour a refreshing 'Gin and Tonic' for their guests so that, from your easy chair, you can watch the sun go down.

It doesn't necessarily need to be this way - as a photographic guide I consider the opportunities for capturing the first nice shots of the evening with golden light. Golden light, which is what every photographer is after, also comes with challenges. Low intensity light can hinder the camera's ability especially when you need a higher shutter speed to capture action. To resolve this issue, some people try to use the flash, I rarely do. The range for most flashes is often not strong enough to reach the subject in the bush, and the shock

effect of the sudden flash often leads to the animal hastily leaving the scene. I prefer to use a spotlight with warm light which can be moderated so as to reduce the effect on the animals' vision. Most nocturnal animals are least affected by spotlights when properly handled. Nowadays you will also see spotlights in the bush with cold LED light...which does not enhance photography. It is the equivalent of putting your subject under fluorescent light so is best avoided.

Low key photography at night, meaning deliberately underexpose your photo's to get the best result

How do I start a typical photographic safari day?

The light just before dusk and dawn is the most interesting, the 'golden moment' in photography. So being an early bird is essential in wildlife photography. Set your camera before you start your safari and stay ahead of a potential new scenario, whether on Manual- or Shutter speed priority. Wildlife photography is dynamic and moving subjects are constantly changing so your shutter speed is most important.

There are always compromising factors in photography. For example, a higher shutter speed will come with either less depth of field (lower aperture number) or a higher ISO number meaning more noise in your picture. Unfortunately there are no solutions to this issue so we need to consider that compromising your shutter speed in Wildlife/ Action photography will end up in blurry pictures whereas a higher ISO will produce grainy pictures. I prefer dealing with grainy pictures as I can work on that part later while post processing my images. A blurry picture always ends up in the bin.

It is important to stay "switched on" ... all the time...

I might have many years of experience in wildlife photography, but even I, like many others, can make mistakes. I may find myself taking pictures in the mornings with the camera settings of the previous evening, which results in my pictures being under exposed because we were shooting using the spotlight during the evening drive. If we come across something exceptional, the excitement of the moment (and often the speed of the action) means we don't have time to make changes to camera settings in the moment. We can learn from these mistakes and prepare by

always being 'ready' - we cannot guarantee we will always get it right but considering the conditions and checking your settings will be a good start!

For those starting out...

For many starting out in photography, the relationship between aperture, shutter speed, and ISO can be confusing. You can read a lot in books, magazines and online, but the best way to learn is when you are actually putting the information into practice. So, if you love going on safari in Africa and you enjoy taking wildlife photos, I suggest that you take your time and experiment with your camera, and there's nowhere better than firsthand in the bush.

First, let's take the confusion out of the concepts by talking about the exposure triangle and why it is important to understand these principles so that you can become a more accomplished photographer.

Exposure is the creation of an image on a digital sensor by using light. Three variables go into the creation of your exposure: Aperture, Shutter Speed and ISO. If you change one of these it will influence on your exposure and one or both of the other two variables. For any photograph, there is only one logically correct exposure. However, there are hundreds of combinations of aperture, shutter speed and ISO that can be used to create that exposure. The combination we choose depends on what our creative imagination for that image is.

During my safaris, I would like to take some of the mystery out of these concepts by talking about the exposure triangle and why it is important to understand for those who are starting out.

That being said, one of the most common mistakes that both beginners and experts make is carrying too much equipment - which seems like a good idea but in actuality is not. A quick response is key. Many a camera gets dropped in the back of the vehicle because the person has brought more than they could handle. Generally keen photographers want to use the right camera with the right lens for a specific shot. It is important to remember that safaris are from a vehicle with a lot of movement in the car so grabbing things quickly from your bag will most of the time work against you. You will drop one of the cameras or make too much movement and noise disturbing wildlife and perhaps fellow photographers.

Keep it simple when you travel, a zoom lens is perhaps not the best in terms of results in comparison to using a fixed lens, but a good zoom lens gives you a lot of flexibility and the benefit of being able to change to different focal

lengths. I learned the hard way; I used to have three bodies - mounted with three different lenses: 24- 70mm - 70-200mm and a fixed 500 mm. I have even broken some lenses and camera-bodies during my trips, so now I keep it simple. On safaris I bring one body - Canon Eos R3 with a zoom lens: 200 - 400mm with internal extender. I also take my iPhone for close up video and wide-angle pics. At the lodge I keep a spare camera body Canon 1dx Mark2 and two lenses for wide angle use.

If you are new to photography, you don't need too much equipment so any reasonable camera with a zoom lens and the ability for you to manually adjust the settings of ISO, shutter speed and aperture and a mobile phone for wide angle shots is all you need. Don't forget that you will need battery chargers and spare batteries as well as memory cards as these fill

up quickly at great wildlife sightings. For more experienced photographers, a DSLR with a zoom lens, perhaps an extender but again, batteries, memory cards and a phone or similar for those wide-angle shots.

So, whatever type of safari you choose, have fun, and enjoy the sights, sounds and hospitality of the very special valley of South Luangwa. You don't need to avoid the dust, just make sure you don't need to change your lens!

In the next issue of Travel & Leisure Zambia, Zimbabwe we will discuss what you can expect from a photographic guide... or contact me for a first-hand experience.

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