A REVELATORY USE OF LIGHT

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There can't be many wildlife photographers who quote Seneca when describing the way they work. David Lloyd is the only one I know who does.

"Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity."

While the setting for Seneca's luck was the court of the emperor Nero, it is on the dusty plains of Kenya where the prepared mind of David Lloyd meets opportunity in the form of prowling lions, migrating wildebeest, imperious elephants and the mysterious, secretive leopard.

Nearly 2000 years may separate the writing of the ancient Roman philosopher and David's sumptuous wildlife photography, but the above quote is one that he freely recites without any hint of pretension in his voice. "I think it's true; I always have an image in mind of what I want to achieve, and when I see those elements coming together and recognise what's happening, then I can get myself into a position to make the picture."

Getting into the right position is a fundamental of all photography. It was the great American landscape photographer, Ansel Adams, who said photography was about knowing where to stand. While also true for the wildlife photographer, choosing the right position is harder to predict because the subject is always on the move. Like many of the predators they follow, wildlife photographers need to conceal and observe, stalk and wait.

'As Long As There Are Animals' is the culmination of many years of watching and waiting. Of course, this applies to many of the very best collections of wildlife photography, but what really sets this book apart is David Lloyd's eye for expression, detail and light. In particular the light, which in so many of the prints has a dramatic intensity that would excite a Shakespearean theatre director.

Whether the profile of a yawning lion, a close-up of an ancient weathered buffalo, or a shadowy glimpse of a leopard in the undergrowth, David's use of light is revelatory. By that I mean the animal's soul is revealed (and preserved in camera) in that split second when a ribbon of light and a tilt of the head allows us to focus on an expression that describes their personality, like individual characters on stage.

Kenneja
Maasai Mara, March 2013

There are a couple of key influences to explain this rare quality. First is David's former career as a graphic designer, working primarily in London, which helped him develop a compositional style whereby the elements of line, shape and light are very simply depicted and always astutely placed. The second key influence is another photographer, interestingly not a wildlife master, but the fashion and portrait artist, Bob Carlos Clarke, whose rich, silk black monochromatic prints continue to inspire the texture and finish of David's own black & white fine art images.

Of course, like many other wildlife photographers of his generation, David also cites Jim Brandenburg, Frans Lanting and Michael Nichols as major influences during his formative years. Growing up in New Zealand, he pored over the pages of every issue of National Geographic that arrived in his letterbox, courtesy of his father's subscription. There was barely an issue without a stunning set of images by one of the legendary triumvirate to absorb his imagination. "I can remember in the mid-80s after seeing Jim Brandenburg's wolf pictures and thinking: 'I'm going to buy a big lens and go off somewhere and take some pictures.' Parental pressures suggested I do something in property, so I didn't do it!"

Fortunately, David eventually chose to follow his dream and Kenya has become his new place of work, the animals his inspiration. And now, we have his first book. He tells me he has many more images in his head "that haven't happened yet", but I am certain that as long as he remembers Seneca's words, and as long as there are animals, those images will turn into photographs that will continue to startle and amaze.

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