

Evelyne Mary Offenstein

Feature

Entries are now open to the Montier Photo Festival Competition, celebrating the latest wildlife photography from all over the world. Last year's winner **Evelyne Mary Offenstein**, a full-time ophthalmologist, tells *Wild Planet* about the thrill of winning and the importance of nature and photography to her life...

Interview by Keith Wilson



A mother polar bear tries to lead her hungry cub to the shore so she can hunt seals, Spitzbergen. This image was awarded the Grand Prix du Festival at the Montier Photo Festival 2014
Nikon D300S, Nikkor 80-400mm f/4.5-5.6 at 270mm, ISO 800, 1/500sec at f/14

A pair of black-browed albatross, South Georgia
Nikon D4, Nikkor 80-400mm f/4.5-5.6 at 400mm,
ISO 1250, 1/5000sec at f/5.6

Feature



After a stealthy approach this leaping jaguar missed his prey, a capybara, which saved itself by plunging deeper into the river, Brazil

Nikon D4, Nikkor 80-400mm f/4.5-5.6 at 135mm, ISO 800, 1/4000sec at f/5.6



Which interest came first: wildlife or photography?

I've always loved going out for walks in the countryside, a breath of fresh air – in the nearby Vosges, or anywhere else on the world – it is essential to me. I hate staying indoors. Wildlife scenes have always held a fascination for me and they sometimes look so similar to ours. I would sometimes take photographs of swans or storks near my place, but my family wasn't interested.

When you were growing up what did you dream of becoming?

When I was a child I was attracted to science, but at the time, about 50 years ago, frogs were dissected alive in class and it did not seem to shock anyone. So I turned to medicine and became an ophthalmologist – I already had a taste for optics.

Did you have any formal training in photography?

I've been lucky enough to go on a package with a wildlife film-maker to Africa and then to other places, surrounded and stimulated by other photo enthusiasts. I got the bug and started practicing! I also attended a workshop with a photographer who taught me the basics and I've learnt a lot from magazines, books, but also admiring the work of other photographers.

You won the Montier photo competition in 2014. To what extent has winning that competition helped you and your photography?

I am an amateur photographer so I was first grateful to make it to the final round of judging, then I was very surprised to be honoured at Montier-en-Der! It is the first and only competition I've ever entered and I am particularly pleased as I am a regular visitor to this



A young mountain gorilla enjoys playing in the trees, not far from his family and under the supervision of the male silverback, Uganda
Sony DSC-H5, 72mm, 4/4.5

“Seeing the mountain gorillas in the impenetrable forest of Bwindi, Uganda. I will never forget the eyes of these endangered animals”

perseverance! Other enthusiasts and I spent hours on deck following albatrosses, petrels, Cape petrels until we were no longer allowed to stay outside.

Do you see your love of wildlife photography as a passion or an obsession?

It is a passion. I make the most of my holidays to go on wildlife trips.

Who are your heroes – past or present – that inspire you?

There is something to learn from everyone! But, I do admire the artistic work of photographers such as Frans Lanting and Vincent Munier.

Out of all your images, which is your favourite?

The winning one! I'm only joking, but I truly believe it looks soft and gentle. I also greatly admire the courage of these solitary animals. I want to show the joie de vivre of the polar bears, their social bonds, their emotions, even if life sometimes forces them to be cruel.

How much gear do you take on a typical photography shoot? Can you list it for me please?

As I mostly photograph animals in the wild and I have to carry the equipment, I do not take more than two Nikon bodies, a D300s and a D4, with two Nikon lenses, the 80-400mm f/4.5-5.6 and wideangle 14-24mm f/2.8.

Do you shoot video?

No, I haven't shot any video yet, even though my camera allows it. It is true that some scenes would often lend themselves to it, but I try to focus on my camera settings.

Are you the sort of photographer who deletes a lot of images when you come back or do you keep everything?

Yes, I delete a lot of images after every field trip, in order to have a nice selection when I get back home, as I do not have much time left when I get back to work.

festival, which I love for the quality of the exhibitors, the speakers, as well as the surrounding countryside, not to mention the magical cranes!

Of course, interviews and publication in magazines followed. I've also met other photographers to share images with or even accompany on future photography tours.

What advice would you give people entering this year's Montier competition?

First, do not hesitate to try your luck! It is a competition so it all depends on a jury at a given time. The decision may be different with other people or on another day. Then, follow your instincts and depict emotion, or

wildlife behaviour.

Which has been the hardest animal to photograph – how did you do it?

Birds in flight shot from a boat tossed in strong Antarctic storms. It was all a matter of patience and

“Photography is a passion. I make the most of my holidays to go on wildlife trips”

Young hyenas play near the entrance of their lair in the absence of the parents

Nikon D300S, Nikkor 80-400mm f/4.5-5.6 at 360mm, ISO 400, 1/320sec at f/9



Where is your favourite location for nature photography?

Africa and the Polar regions. They are two places that give me complete changes of scenery and where I gladly go back to whenever I get the chance.

Where in the world would you most like to photograph that you haven't yet been?

I'd love to go to Kamchatka in Russia, or Alaska. I'd love to see the brown bears.

What has been your most exciting moment as a photographer?

Seeing the mountain gorillas in the impenetrable forest of Bwindi, Uganda. These animals are so peaceful, they show so much joie de vivre and there is so much expression in their eyes! I will never forget the eyes of these endangered animals.

And the most embarrassing?

When I was in Gombe, Tanzania, I was lucky enough

to get close to chimpanzees in the dark jungle... and my camera lens misted up just opposite the first chimpanzee I met, who was standing only a few metres away! Fortunately, things got better afterwards, but I changed my equipment when I came back home.

What's the next big project or assignment we can expect from Evelyne Mary Offenstein?

I'm going back to the Arctic in the summer, travelling from the north of Spitzbergen to Franz Joseph Land.

I'm really looking forward to it!

What is the best piece of advice that you can give to someone who wants to become a nature photographer?

I'm not a professional photographer, but I think as in any other area, work, motivation and perseverance pay off. And Montier may be an excellent springboard!

● *Special thanks to Coralie Blanchard and Emilie Gallois*

The mother feeds her cub, partly secluded, before continuing their journey, Spitzbergen

Nikon D300S, Nikkor 80-400mm f/4.5-5.6 at 400mm, ISO 800, 1/2000sec at f/6.3



"I want to show the joie de vivre of the polar bears, their social bonds, their emotions"



Evelyne Mary Offenstein

is a Strasbourg-based ophthalmologist, who has enjoyed nature photography for most of her adult life.

In 2014 she was the overall winner from more than 9,000 entries in the Montier Photo Festival Competition. She travels frequently to the Arctic, Antarctic and Africa and her images are published in major French and international photo magazines.



More about Montier

The Montier Photo Festival Competition is open to all nature photographers from all over the world, both amateur and professional. For the International Competition and the Young Competition, entries need to be pictures of fauna, flora, or landscape, as well as documentary images depicting habitat and species conservation and biodiversity.

There are three age groups in the Young Competition: 8-11, 12-15, 16-18. Last year, the nine categories in the International Competition received more than 9,000 entries in total, from 31 countries. Entry to both competitions is free and the winning images will be exhibited at the 19th Montier Photo Festival from 19-22 November. Last year's festival attracted more than 40,000 visitors. The closing date is May 31.

● **International Competition registration & entry:** <http://www.festphoto-montier.org/portail15/concours>

● **Young Competition registration & entry:** <http://www.festphoto-montier.org/portail15/concours-jeunes>