



Call of the wild

Since relocating to Namibia, Scott Hurd has turned his passion for photography into a tool for conservation.

About Scott

With retirement approaching, in 2007 I left the UK and my occupation as a motivational speaker and set up a new life with my wife, Judy, in Otjiwarongo, Namibia, to concentrate on my first love – photography.



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Can you remember when you first used a camera?

I was only four years old when my favourite aunt allowed me to take my first photograph with her Box Brownie. I was instantly hooked. When I was eight I 'borrowed' my mum's precious camera to cover a school trip to London Zoo – my first 'wildlife' experience!

From that point on photography was always a big part of me. I shot weddings for friends, used photography for my work in education, and was glued to my camera on holiday. Approaching retirement, I moved across the world to a small town in the African bush called Otjiwarongo. Turning pro, especially in a country like Namibia, was the fulfilment of many dreams and much more fun than retirement. The fact that my wife, Judy, wanted to be part of this dream made the impossible possible.

How and why did you become involved with conservation photography?

With few professional photographers in the

Above A Cape pangolin, walks on her hind legs – her digging claws makes walking on all fours awkward. This was the first pangolin rescued by the Rare and Endangered Species Trust (REST). *EOS 7D, Sigma 17-70mm f2.8 lens at 17mm, 1/500 second at f8, ISO 640.*

Shooting free

Scott often shoots 'blind' especially when photographing small animals or children. As soon as he's down on the ground they invariably head off elsewhere, so instead he puts the camera on continuous drive and fires rapidly, moving around with his subject without looking through the viewfinder. This is how he captured the pangolin on her hind legs (above).



country, our new business grew quickly. We'd expected mainly to be photographing lodges and hotels, but never anticipated the huge variety of work that came in, nor the demand to learn digital photography. Every photo course we put on filled up several times over.

Almost every job took us into the bush or the desert and exposed us to spectacular scenery, wonderful wildlife, and fascinating people, many of whom were involved in conservation. Their enthusiasm was infectious.

What was your first conservation project?

Our first conservation project was photographing vultures, when a friend who ran the Rare and Endangered Species Trust (REST) asked for a few identification (ID) photos.

In Asia, many aged but revered cattle are given painkillers, which although effective, also kill the vultures which ultimately feed on the bovine corpses. So a study was set up using African vultures to find an alternative. White-backed vultures were captured, weighed, measured and injected, then their wings were spread wide for me to shoot the ID photos. We captured, processed, and photographed 120 individuals over the course of one day under the baking African sun. The trial was successful and now the Asian vultures are making a comeback.

Without vultures to clean up the bush and deserts we would have many more major pandemics. Vultures don't just clear away dead animal flesh, they also destroy the viruses and

Above A Cape pangolin baby, the first born in captivity. It's mother was rescued from the illegal medicine trade. *EOS 7D, Sigma 17-70mm lens at 70mm, 1/60 second at f8, ISO 400.*

Top right Dr Maria Diekman with a rescued pangolin. The aperture was small enough to ensure that both subjects were in focus. *EOS-1D X, EF 24-105mm f4L IS USM lens at 24mm, 1/160 second at f10, ISO 400.*

Right New facts about pangolins are constantly emerging. Normally docile and friendly, we never realised that they are ferociously territorial and protective. We also thought that they avoided water – how wrong can you be? *EOS-1D X, EF 24-105mm f4L IS USM lens at 88mm, 1/1250 second at f8, ISO 800.*



Diverse portfolio

The open spaces, wildlife and people were what initially drew me to Namibia. As a photographer, I had expected to be involved in mainly lodge and hotel publicity work, the occasional wedding or baby shoot, but I did not expect to be shooting such diverse and fascinating work.

I never know what the next phone call will bring. I could be training anti-poaching units out in the bush, photographing aged freedom fighters, or a President. I could be camped out in the desert shooting ID photographs of wild horses, covering a big tribal wedding or working with pangolins. One of my most unexpected projects has been to document the construction of a new gold mine, from virgin bush to the first gold bar. My knowledge of African wildlife means that my images have been used in conservation campaigns and publications worldwide.



Above A white-backed vulture working hard to take off after a big meal. EOS-1D X, EF 28-300mm f3.5-5.6L IS USM lens at 300mm, 1/1000 second at f10, ISO 500.



Top right A white-backed vulture being tested with a new pain relief drug. This was part of a successful drugs trial with the aim of saving the Asian vulture population from extinction. EOS 5D, EF 28-300mm f3.5-5.6L IS USM lens at 220mm, 1/125 second at f8, ISO 200.

Centre right A white-backed vulture being weighed and measured prior to release. EOS 5D, EF 28-300mm f3.5-5.6L IS USM lens at 200mm, 1/200 second at f5.6, ISO 400.

Bottom right An endangered Cape Griffon vulture feeding. EOS-1D X, EF 28-300mm f3.5-5.6L IS USM lens at 300mm, 1/1600 second at f8, ISO 800.

diseases that those carcasses carry, which would otherwise mutate and spread.

For some years, African vultures have also been under deliberate attack. When a wild animal is killed, vultures quickly gather; Anti-Poaching Units see them spiralling and go to investigate. To prevent this, poachers lace the carcass with poison. One carcass may kill a scavenging lion or two, a few hyenas and a whole family of jackals, but it can take out thousands of vultures at a time. These birds are now under threat.

What are the specific challenges of conservation photography, and how are your images used?

Each animal presents its own challenges, joys, and sometimes horrors too. It's a privilege to be involved and to be useful.

My images might be used to raise public awareness (and possibly money) and for education and research. These days we live in such an image-led society, and my camera is there to act as an advocate for the animal concerned.

I still get a tremendous kick out of seeing my images at work in the wider world – be it at a supermarket checkout or on the front cover of a publication, especially if it's a magazine that I know and respect.



What other projects have you been involved in, and with what sort of animals?

A pangolin was rescued in Otjiwarongo and found its way to Dr Maria Diekmann, our friend at REST (now called Pangolins International). Pangolins are rarely seen in the wild; they can't be kept in zoos as they must forage for special ants, morning and evening. Consequently, there were very few photographs of this timid creature and we were invited to fill this gap.

What none of us knew at the time was that this pangolin was pregnant. Maria had no suitable accommodation for the animal, so it ended up in her bedroom and shortly became the first known pangolin to give birth in captivity, which was a fabulous bonus.

There followed a nationwide campaign to raise awareness of this endangered species, including photo shoots, articles, children's books, and advertising at supermarkets throughout the country. The images sparked interest in this almost unknown animal and pangolin fever spread across the country and the world.

Pangolin scales and flesh are worth big money in some parts of the world and statistics showed it to be the most poached and trafficked animal on the planet. The image of the pangolin on her

Top White-backed vultures feeding on a dead cow in the early morning light. EOS 7D, EF 28-300mm f3.5-5.6L IS USM lens at 300mm, 1/500 second at f8, ISO 800.

Above left An endangered Cape Griffon vulture tearing meat. EOS-1D X, EF 28-300mm f3.5-5.6L IS USM lens at 260mm, 1/2000 second at f8, ISO 800.

Above right The wings of a white-backed vulture are spread wide for its ID photo. EOS 350D, EF 28-300mm f3.5-5.6L IS USM lens at 35mm, 1/160 second at f8, ISO 100.

rear legs (page 12) took the conservation world by storm, even headlining the CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) conference in London, an event that took the pangolin from obscurity to the top of the red list for endangered species.

Much of our lodge and hotel publicity work has been for the Gondwana Collection, an expanding travel and safari company in Namibia, which makes a point of being sympathetic to the environment. For research purposes, the company wanted ID photos of the desert-adapted (and now wild) horses in the Tsau Khaeb National Park (formerly known as Sperrgebiet or the Forbidden Zone). This was another mammoth task, made possible because there was only one water hole – all the horses had to drink there at some point. We also had a secret weapon – Dr Telani Greyling, who has worked with the horses for years and knew them all by name, which helped us to avoid duplication.

These horses are so different from their domesticated counterparts. Their behaviour fascinated me and I soon began to include

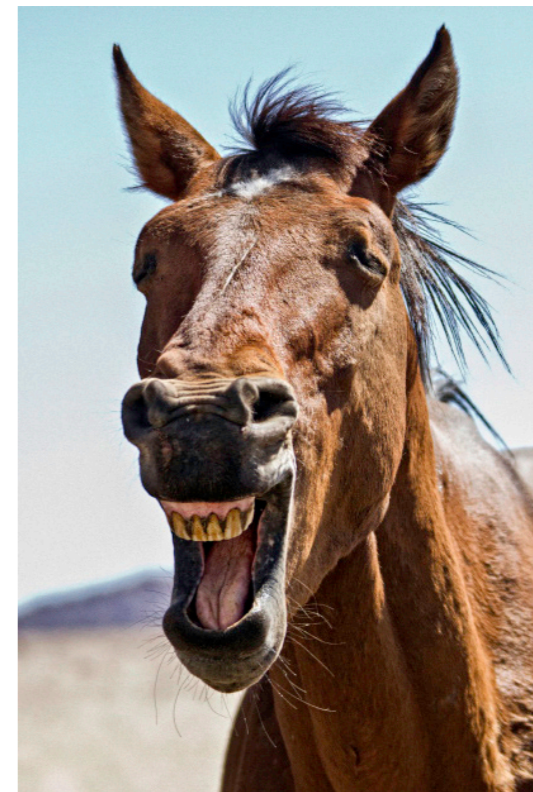
Reflecting on my gear

I've never been a gear junkie, although I was quick to adopt the EOS 10D and, later, the EOS 5D. Then, for many years I found the EOS 7D to be a perfect tool, but when the EOS-1D X came out I knew I'd found a friend. It's tough, reliable and gives me what I want.

Working in the bush and deserts of Namibia – often hot, dry, and dusty environments – means that carrying multiple cameras is not an option. Water is far more important and my rucksack is for survival gear, not camera gear. In the field I wear a couple of camera bags diagonally, which for me works far better than a rucksack. Putting the animal in context and recording its behaviour is more my style than going for portraits, so I don't require Canon's very long lenses. I find long lenses tend to get in my way, especially when I'm operating from my pick-up truck.

In 2004 Canon introduced the EF 28-300mm f3.5-5.6L IS USM lens; it's by no means my only lens, but I use it more than any other. After twelve years the focus was becoming slow and tired, so Fixation UK rebuilt it with new IS and motors – a big but very worthwhile investment.

In terms of lighting, my Speedlite 600EX-RT is usually to hand – even in the desert – and if I'm using multiple flash I have a couple of Speedlite 580EX units.



Far left Cooling down with a self-made shower. The desert-adapted horses usually only spend a short time at the water hole. They can take on about 40 litres of water in only five minutes. They come in with ribs showing and leave looking almost plump. EOS 7D, Tamron 18-270mm f3.5-5.5 lens at 76mm, 1/1250 second at f8, ISO 640.

Left Horses can gain all kinds of information by curling back their upper lip to expose their front teeth (the flehmen response) drawing air over the Jacobson's organ, especially if they have been sampling the dung heaps. EOS 7D, EF 28-300mm f3.5-5.6L IS USM lens at 120mm, 1/1250 second at f5.6, ISO 640.

Digital learning

Film taught me to wait for the optimum moment – and often I'd miss it. My conservation work, with a digital camera, has undoubtedly made me a better photographer. It has taught me to keep working to ensure the best shot, then to home in on the most effective image and make the most of it.

There are thousands of individuals working hard to conserve nature. Their work naturally places them in isolated pockets, but photography spreads their passion and brings about change that words cannot.

Clockwise from the top

Wild horses walk in a string between water and the mountains to find food and shelter from the sun. EOS 7D, EF 28-300mm f3.5-5.6L IS USM lens at 80mm, 1/4000 second at f8, ISO 640.

Even before the drought, life in the Tsau Khaeb National Park was far from easy, especially for a mother with a suckling foal. EOS 5D, EF 28-300mm f3.5-5.6L IS USM lens at 28mm, 1/1600 second at f8, ISO 400.

A family group coming in to drink at the only water hole. EOS 7D, EF 28-300mm f3.5-5.6L IS USM lens at 280mm, 1/3200 second at f8, ISO 800.

A horse with her back to the wind, fighting for survival in the recent seven-year drought. EOS-1D X, EF 28-300mm f3.5-5.6L IS USM lens at 130mm, 1/3200 second at f8, ISO 1000.

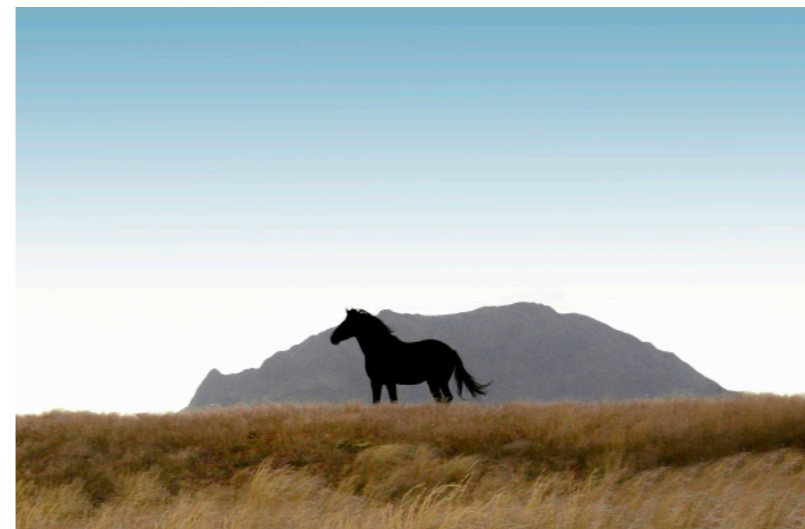
Sparring is common among stallions of the Namib desert herd, but it's rare for them to show real violence towards each other. EOS 7D, EF 28-300mm f3.5-5.6L IS USM lens at 28mm, 1/2500 second at f8, ISO 640.

behavioural shots in the brief.

Over ten days as the horses came to drink, Judy and I worked at right angles to each other. That way, we could stay out of each other's line-of-sight and get the required front, side, gait and head shot of each horse. Each night the three of us huddled around a laptop, selecting the best images and identifying the horses. The images were also used for public awareness and advertising through a national competition sponsored by the Gondwana Collection.

Shortly after this shoot a seven-year drought hit the Namib, leading to a series of uncomfortable decisions by the Namib Wild Horse Foundation in conjunction with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism. Should these wild animals be fed? Feeding was put off for as long as possible, but the horses could not be left to die. Money was needed, and I found myself giving talks to raise cash; the behavioural shots proved invaluable.

Unfortunately, feeding the horses congregated them and a family of hyena moved in on this new, fast-food joint and preyed on the younger animals. Should we step in again? Could we dart, trap and



relocate the hyenas? After several failed attempts a national debate was sparked. Which were more important, the horses or the hyenas? Arguments raged on social media. Just before the herd's number dropped to an unsustainable level an anonymous horse-lover stepped in and decided for us. The herd is now recovering, and the future looks bright – until the next drought.

Do you use flash when photographing wild animals or is it discouraged?

Out on a late evening bush walk with a pangolin, or photographing a horse into the sun demands light reinforcement. Generally, if the animal is comfortable then I'm comfortable too. However, I'm often with someone who knows the animal better than I do, so I enlist their help and advice. In daylight I am almost always able to use fill-flash, although if electrical storms are in the air animals are more easily spooked, so I resort to

Left A wild horse in the Tsau Khaeb National Park in times of plenty. EOS 5D, EF 28-300mm f3.5-5.6L IS USM lens at 65mm, 1/320 second at f8, ISO 500.

Right Finding something to eat on the edge of the hills in the Tsau Khaeb National Park. EOS 7D, EF 28-300mm f3.5-5.6L IS USM lens at 80mm, 1/1000 second at f5.6, ISO 800.

For more of Scott and Judy's images, visit: www.h4urd.co.uk



overexposing by a stop or two.

Flash photography of animals at night-time is a no-no in my book. A prey animal's defensive eyesight is ruined for at least half-an-hour and a predator's very sensitive night vision can be ruined for much longer, causing it to starve.

The light in Namibia is often dramatic and the dry atmosphere creates a huge dynamic range. Direct light here is more intense than most photographers are used to, and there's no moisture to reflect or refract it into the shadows. Almost all shade is deep and dark, resulting in areas of dramatically poor light, leading me to use flash much more here in Namibia than in the UK.

Shooting my first Namibian wedding took me by surprise. As most ceilings are brown or thatch, I had a problem bouncing the flash. With wildlife photography there are rarely ceilings, so for close-ups shots I angle the light upwards and use diffusers, but I use direct flash if shooting from a distance or when using fill-in flash.

Tell us more about working with the Anti-Poaching Units.

I was asked to teach photography to Anti-Poaching



Units (APUs). They are front-line troops on active service, so I can't reveal an awful lot. We spent many hours out in the bush, concentrating on the practical aspects of photography, including shooting in low light and no light conditions. We then worked through the theory in the shelter of a blacked-out store shed. It was an odd feeling when going out with them, knowing that they were targets and, by association, so was I.

The APUs need photographs for evidence, and there is also a bounty on any sharp and identifiable image that can be used for research purposes.

What photographic techniques do you most use, and how have they changed over the years?

When I learned my photography back in the sixties, my camera – with no rangefinder nor exposure meter – demanded that I work manually. Much later, the EOS 10D introduced me to aperture-priority (Av) mode and by the time the EOS 5D came along I had switched to using this shooting mode more than any other.

The picture quality at high ISO values has improved exponentially over the years. I watch

Above Anti-Poaching Units use images for evidence and identification purposes. (The subject's face has been obscured for anonymity.) *EOS-1D X, EF 28-300mm f3.5-5.6L IS USM lens at 90mm, 1/80 second at f5.6, ISO 800.*

Top right One of many cruel star traps found on game trails on one farm. *EOS-1D X, EF 28-300mm f3.5-5.6L IS USM lens at 60mm, 1/1000 second at f8, ISO 640.*

Centre right Working with the Anti-Poaching Units has brought Scott into close proximity with white rhinos. *EOS-1D X, EF 28-300mm f3.5-5.6L IS USM lens at 190mm, 1/5000 second at f5.6, ISO 1600.*

Bottom right Poachers lace carcasses with poison to eliminate vultures because they advertise the kill. *EOS-1D X, EF 28-300mm f3.5-5.6L IS USM lens at 300mm, 1/1600 second at f10, ISO 640.*



the shutter speed at the bottom of the viewfinder and control it using the ISO, setting it as fast as is sensible. It's often well over 1/1000 second. I thought I'd miss using manual mode, but since I can under- or overexpose using the Quick Control Dial, I don't.

My starter settings are aperture-priority shooting mode and an aperture of f8 at ISO 800, although I do deviate from that in good light, bad light, or when I'm in the UK when the light is very different.

With the big buffer on the EOS-1D X for intense bursts of images, I work almost exclusively in RAW file format, although if the images are needed quickly and I'm out in the desert with the laptop, I'll shoot JPEGs.

I normally process the images back home on my computer, which has a decent large monitor. I learned Photoshop when it first came out (around 2000) and, with Bridge as my organiser, I've grown with it. When using Camera Raw, the Clarity setting is a must and, with our intense, bright natural light and deep shade, the Highlights and Shadows controls are invaluable. I tend to use Levels and the History Brush more than anything.

Photoshop has replaced my darkroom, but it



does so much more, so much more easily, and I don't end up smelling of chemicals!

What advice would you pass on to photographers who are just staring out with an interchangeable lens camera (ILC)?

At college I was told always to remember two things – f8 and to be in the right place. An aperture of f8 – usually the lens' sweet spot – gives decent depth-of-field and the best chance of getting a crisp shot. Today's cameras, with higher ISO values, make this so much more possible than before. However, being in the right place is critical; if you're not positioned where you need to be you won't get the shot – however good a photographer you think you are.

In terms of your photography, what does the future hold for you?

Semi-retirement has meant that I can cherry-pick paying jobs, so I concentrate on wildlife and conservation – the things I love.

During lockdown our daughter introduced me to Zoom and suggested I did talks for camera clubs. This venture took off and, with various talks about a pro photographer's life in Namibia, wildlife and conservation, they're still running. The speaking engagements – on Zoom or in person – keep me grounded and give me a purpose, so expanding these is sensible, especially when I can include conservation issues.

People tell me I'm living the dream; others say I'm lucky. I assure them, luck has nothing to do with it!



Top An endangered black rhino before he was dehorned in an attempt to deter poaching. *EOS-1D X, EF 28-300mm f3.5-5.6L IS USM lens at 300mm, 1/1250 second at f8, ISO 400.*

Above A black rhino emerging from the bush in Etosha. His front horn has been removed, but disappointed poachers, having tracked one with no horn, kill them anyway. *EOS-1D X, EF 28-300mm f3.5-5.6L IS USM lens at 300mm, 1/3200 second at f7.1, ISO 1250.*

Working in the field

Image storage and recharging batteries used to be a big concern when working in the field. I used to carry a laptop everywhere along with masses of batteries, but now modern large memory cards and a number of LP-E4N batteries keep me going. This puts me off changing to a camera with a higher resolution, or to one with an electronic shutter. My EOS-1D X works fine, but I can dream of an EOS R3 and then I'd have eye-tracking too!