TAKE BETTER PHOTOS IN NAMIBIA
A step-by-step Online Training Course
Claudia & Wynand du Plessis www.take-better-photos-in-namibia.com

MODULE 7: WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY IN ETOSHA

Adding Creativity to Your Photos

What You'll Learn In This Module is

- The creative use of light in Etosha
- Arranging the visual content creatively and about
- Creative photographic techniques for your wildlife photography in Etosha

Let's start with

1. The creative use of light

Light is an important artistic element in photography. In Namibia, and here in Etosha, you get the warmest and softest light in the early morning & late afternoon, we talked about it already, and therefore these should be the main times for your photography. On contrast, if you take images during lunch time, these 'midday photos' will have washed out colors and hard shadows. On top of that, in Etosha you have got whitish soils in many areas, which reflect the sunlight from all around, therefore the light becomes very bright very quickly - you'll notice this when you take your sunglasses off during the day, it's hard to look without squinching your eyes.

Let’s looks at the **direction of the light**, which is also very important. Where there is light, there is shadow. Both light and shadow parts can be very powerful elements in your images. It’s therefore quite important to always consider the direction of the light, where it’s coming from, and where it’ll cast shadows, before taking a photo. Let’s talk a bit about this.

You’ll have **‘front light’,** when the sun is behind you and fully lights the animal in front of you. The shadow is mostly behind the animal and of little concern. You’ll get a uniformly lit animal and best colors. However, the light can appear rather flat with little 3D form at times.

With **side light**, the light comes from the side of the animal, meaning that you and your subject have the sun to one of your sides. And the result is that either part of the face or part of the body is in shade. Side light reveals often more texture and detail and the image has more 3D form than with front light. But you have to watch out, sometimes shadows may be distracting and they will become harder towards midday, which can be quite bothering especially in an animal portrait. Remember when you watch out for bothering shadows that your camera is less able to distinguish details and color in hard shadows than the human eye.

Then you can have **back light**, meaning that you shoot straight into the light. The light comes from behind the animal and the shadow is on the front side of the animal facing you. You’ll get little texture, detail or color on the shaded animal and the image will become flatter and two-dimensional. But this can be used to your creative advantage, we will talk about it just now, and the shadow side may be underexposed, if the bright background is correctly exposed. So, how to deal with back light? Firstly you can create silhouettes by correctly exposing for the bright background, which will automatically underexpose your backlit animal, in

this way you use the high contrast creatively. Make sure you get real blacks and do underexpose manually, if it's necessary. You can get very artistic effects with back light with careful composition. Another possibility in photography is to use fill-in flash, but in Etosha you usually don't often get into normal 'flash distances', maybe except for birds in trees, and therefore we won't get into this in this course.

Let's talk about **atmospheric light in Etosha in dusty conditions**. We've talked quite a bit about the fact that Namibia mostly is a dry and dusty country. A great way to show this in your images is with light too. Very moody and atmospheric images with dust are possible in Etosha and best captured at the height of the dry season and at sunset. Waterholes are great for this because they are especially dusty places with thousands of hooves and feet of countless animals kicking up dust, that lingers in the air for hours. Side light but especially back light enhances the radiating effect, the best waterholes for this are looking west at sunset, they are Okaukuejo, M'Bari, Halali, Kalkheuwel and Chudop. Please look at the 'Best Etosha waterhole sightings map' PDF included in the course. The best waterholes looking east for sunrise images are Okondeka, Nebrowni, Gemsbokvlakte, Goas, Chudop surrounding & Klein Namutoni.

On the other hand you can also get **quite atmospheric light** when there are **thunder storms**. This would be in the rainy season, when you get storm clouds and actual rain storms, and you'll also have a high moisture content in the air. This often gives great opportunities for images that are more colorful than during dusty conditions. And with a thick cloud cover

you get diffused light, which is softer and has less contrast, and the shadows therefore will have fill-in light from the radiating surroundings. When you've got a thunderstorm during the golden hours you may have constantly changing and dramatic light and many great photo opportunities in all directions. You may even get spectacular rainbows, so use these opportunities well.

Now we would like to talk about how to

2. Arrange the Visual Content Creatively

Some of Etosha's animals have very **distinct shapes** which can make for stunning images. Since Etosha has a vast flat horizon this offers great chances for photogenic silhouettes especially at sunset & sunrise. Good shapes are found with species like giraffe, elephants, rhinos, gemsbok, wildebeest and springbok. The key is to choose a low viewpoint with a lot of sky, you want to see the legs in the silhouette as well. If necessary, change your position to change the angle of the light on the animals. Another great way for silhouettes it to turn towards the sky and focus on birds that overnight in trees. They usually settle down around sunset and sometimes do so conveniently for us close to waterholes adjacent to Etosha's camps. So look out for these 'sleeping trees' in and around the camp grounds and you might be lucky to capture similar images to these of Abdim's storks settling in for the night right next to the Okaukuejo waterhole.

Some animal species also have photogenic **skin patterns** that are ideal for interesting abstract images, such as elephant, zebra, giraffe, cheetah and leopard. You can focus on one individual animal in a herd by using a long telephoto lens for a close-up shot. Or you may also include many

animals in one shot to illustrate patterns when they are tightly grouped together.

It also makes for more interesting images if you try to show **depth & distance**, when you've got a large group of animals. It works well when you use a lower viewpoint and focus on the closest animals, and then use a long telephoto lens with a wide aperture. The same applies on a very flat space, for example when you find an open herd of zebra on the Etosha Pan. Again look for a very low viewpoint, which is possible at the Etosha look-out point or at Pan's edge, focus on the closest animals and use a long telephoto lens with a wide aperture. In this image of a herd of elephant approaching to drink we again had a very low viewpoint but, since we were quite close, we used a wide angle lens with the horizon in the middle. The same applies in this image when three elephant bulls approached our car.

You should also make use of the art element of **lines** in Etosha, be they horizontal, vertical, diagonal or curves. You can get **vertical lines,** when the animals walk in single file to a waterhole as especially zebra, springbok and elephants do. **Diagonal lines**, such as in this image, actually create a more dynamic image as they lead the eye through the picture. Great waterholes for capturing animals walking in line are Okaukuejo, Gemsbokvlakte, Rietfontein, Chudop and Klein Namutoni. You'll get **horizontal lines** when animals drink next to each other and whenever you take a landscape photo with animals in the frame. You can choose a low, a middle or a high horizon, which all create a different mood or a different emphasize on certain aspects. Sometimes you have a choice to place it at liberty, sometimes you don't. In this image here of grazing zebras under a stormy sky we chose a low horizon because it gives space to show the dramatic sky. In the image of a full-frame

elephant the line is in the middle, and we didn't actually have a choice in this exact situation. In this image of springbok the higher horizon is a good choice as it emphasizes the plains which are the springboks' favorite habitat.

Let's talk about

3. Creative photographic techniques

for your wildlife photography in Etosha. A very effective creative photographic technique, which we use often without thinking of it, is choosing your **angle of view**. You can create very different images only by choosing a certain angle of view (also called field of view), which means by deciding how much of the scene is visible in the viewfinder. You determine the angle of view much by the focal length of the lens of your choice. You'll get a wide view with your wide angle lens, a medium view with your normal lens or a rather zoomed-in telephoto view with your telephoto lens. Your angle of view is of course influenced by your sensor size, we talked about this before, because a full-frame sensor gets the full view from your lens, for example you get a 300 mm view with a 300 mm lens. Whereas a cropped-frame sensor gives you only part of the view, meaning when you put a 300 mm lens on you get the equivalent view of a 450mm lens or similar, depending on your camera.

How interesting an image is, is also often determined by the **perspective**, the sense of depth or spatial relationships between objects in an image. You can actively change the perspective by changing your angle of view by changing your lens, which we just talked about, and by moving closer or further away, up or down or left or right. We already

mentioned earlier that you usually want to photograph wildlife at eye level.

To get an **eye level perspective** with larger animals, such as zebra or lion, it's mostly easy in Etosha as you photograph them from your car which is often at the eye level height of the animals. With taller animals, such as giraffe & elephant, you can achieve the desired eye level perspective when they are further away or when your position is higher by using a long telephoto lens. For smaller animals, such as squirrels or foxes, staying at eye level can be tricky in Etosha, as these animals are often just next to the road, and you would photograph down onto them from your car. You can do two things about it: You can look out for them standing on their burrow heap, keep a distance and then use a long lens to get the full body view, or you often find squirrels inside the Etosha camps, where they are also relatively tame, so you get quite close. Here you can lie on your belly and use a long lens or a shorter one, depending how tame they are, to get a full body view.

At some waterholes in Etosha you'll get a **perspective from above**, such as at Salvadora (from inside your car) or at Halali (from a higher viewpoint on foot). Photographing from above, gives you quite an unusual perspective. When you use a wide angle for example and point down to get little or no sky, you will in this way put the emphasis on the animals in the foreground. When you on the other hand use a long lens you can again isolate an individual or a herd, such as here the elephants in the leaf-less dry Mopane vegetation.

When you choose a **perspective from below**, such as when an elephant or giraffe is close to you, you'll make them appear much taller than you and your viewpoint, which can also be a deliberate statement. You can even exaggerate this perspective intentionally by using a wider

lens or move even closer if possible or go even lower. Here in this image, the extreme close-up view and low perspective also adds to the feeling of depth.

You can also make use of a **straight-on perspective** for example when a herd of animals drinks next to each other and is directly opposite your viewpoint. It's even more interesting, if they look straight at you like these lions taking an early morning drink at M'bari. You can get similar images at the waterholes of Tsumcor, Gemsbokvlakte and Okaukuejo

Another creative photographic technique you can use for better images is **framing**. With careful framing you focus the attention on the main motive. You decide what is in and what is out and you set the boundaries of your image.

The first thing you actually have to decide on before you take the shot is the format that's best suited to the situation, whether you're going to shoot in a **vertical format** or **horizontal format**. For example the leopard sitting under the shrub is better suited for a vertical format compared to the leopard walking, which fits better into a horizontal format. Try both formats if you can, when you're unsure which format is better.

Framing can also create intimacy. By tightly cropping into an animal's body you move in closer and thus give an even more intimate impression of the animal than if you had left space around. Framing can generate emotions and express a relationship. In this image of the zebra foal the chosen framing implies that the young zebra is protected by its mother; it suggests a close relationship between mother & foal. The framing in this image of a lion cub & mother also emphasizes the close

and tender relationship between them. In this photograph of the baby elephant the framing accentuates the fact that the calf is taken care of by the herd. And here the cropped-in framing stresses the care with which the springbok newborn is being nurtured by its mother. Framing can also show size differences and depth, such as here where the gemsbok is photographed through the legs of an elephant - you can do this nicely at the Nebrowni waterhole -, or here where a lone gemsbok is surrounded by numerous springbok. You can also frame an animal with a deliberate shallow depth and thereby blur the background. In this way you isolate the main subject such as here the image of a Black-backed jackal at dusk. And yet another effective way for interesting framing is to use trees to frame animals, like here this lioness on a zebra kill. When you select a certain way of framing & composing your image always make sure there are no picture elements that are distracting in the background and therefore draw your attention away from your actual focus of your image. If there is something bothering, change your framing by changing your viewpoint, your angle of view (lens) and your perspective. Also try to position your subject in the frame in a way that it looks into the frame and not out.

This has been Module 7: Wildlife Photography in Etosha - Adding Creativity to Your Photos

Now we would like you to take action:

- Make a list of which special wildlife images from Etosha speak the most to you?

- Which special light situations are the most beautiful to you?
- Which compositions are the most striking to you and would you like to capture on your visit to Etosha?

Thanks for listening & see you again at Module 8