

Wildlife Photography course 2009 – EcoTraining

Some people have a saying about Africa: “Once you’ve been there and you loved it, it has infected your system and you can’t get it out”. I’m one of those persons who totally agree with that statement. I especially can’t get enough of Africa’s nature. You can’t find nature like Africa’s anywhere else in the world. I decided that I wanted to make my hobby, my work. But firstly I wanted to be sure whether or not I really wanted to do that. So I decided to participate in the wildlife photography course, given by wildlife photographer Lex Hes.

So after months of waiting, I finally arrived at Jaydee camp in Timbavati game reserve on the first day of June 2009. *I met the other people who took the course and Lex Hes and his wife Lynn.* I immediately felt at ease there. We introduced ourselves, learned a bit about our cameras and went for our first afternoon drive. We knew there was a giraffe killed by three male lions, so we headed that way. After stopping next to a “daggaboy” who was reluctant to come out of the shade, we drove directly to the lions. I couldn’t believe I actually saw a lion eating a giraffe. I’ve never seen such a thing in my whole life! I also couldn’t believe that my stomach handled it quite well. I put my camera on continuous shooting and just pressed the button. After we came back, we had a lovely dinner (which didn’t include a raw giraffe) in the boma around the campfire. It was the perfect end of a perfect day and for me the course was already a success. I decided to go to bed and asked Lex to wake me up at five o’clock next morning.

Normally I sleep very light, but Lex had to knock five times the next morning to wake me up. I got up, dressed and went to the kitchen for some tea and biscuits. Around 6 o’clock we left for our first morning drive. We went back to the kill from last night and noticed that the lions were gone, because the vultures were eating heartily and there was a hyena (with one paw missing) stealing some food.



That morning we saw the same lions hidden in a bush. We didn’t get a opportunity to take nice pictures, because the background and surroundings weren’t good. But that’s the bush, you don’t get to choose where the animals are situated.

When we came back after having tea at the dam, we had a lovely brunch and some time to put our pictures on the computer. We got our first lecture from Lex about different photographic elements and after a siesta we went on a afternoon drive to put our our newly learned tips to test.

So this was the routine everyday: get up early, tea and biscuits, morning drive, brunch, lecture, siesta, afternoon drive and dinner.

I've never felt so good in my entire life. I wasn't even tired of getting up so early.

That third morning I only got a bit frustrated. We traced a male leopard track. But after an hour or so of driving through the bush, getting branches in my face, navigating on the sounds of the alarm calls, we didn't find him. That leopard was definitely avoiding us.

That evening I got not one but two leopards! We first saw a female leopard eating a impala ram she caught. She was calling her cub and we wondered if it would show up. And yes, suddenly out of nowhere the cub stood next to our car. So we got some good pictures that evening.



The next morning we went back to that place and saw hyena running away. When we got closer, we spotted the impala hanging in a tree, just high enough to restrain the hyena from stealing it. The leopards weren't there...yet. Eventually we saw a leopard (probably the male leopard we tracked the day before), lying on the opposite bank of the dry river-bed. He was looking at something on our side of the river, so we started looking and spotted the leopard cub from yesterday. The male leopard chased her away. We followed her and that was the beginning of an hour of posing by the cub. I think we've all got lovely pictures of that morning and I'm sure that we were totally satisfied about the amount of leopards we've seen that week.

I learned so much in that week, about photography, but also about the bush. I used to be very afraid of elephant, but after standing in the center of a herd of elephant twice and observing their behaviour, you know whether they don't want you there or not. The same for standing in the center of a buffalo herd. Before this course I wouldn't have dared to do that at all. I was already afraid when an elephant or buffalo was standing ten meters from the car. So in this respect I learned a lot. But I also learned about a few tracks and sounds. Lex was trying to have a conversation with a pearl spotted owl, so I'll never forget that sound.

I decided that this is what I want to do. I've actually had the best time of my life there and was longing to go back, even when I stayed in Kruger National Park for two weeks after the course. Jaydee camp was absolutely wonderful. There was a peace there, like I've never imagined. No people shouting, no children crying, nothing but the sounds of the bush. I would like to thank ecotraining and especially Lex and his wife and Lucas (our tracker) for the most wonderful experience of my life!

Nicole Goedhart