



Getting Your Shot in the Wild - *the ethics*

By Vihangi De Mel

Wildlife Photography sure ain't what it used to be.

Not that it's a bad thing. Today's improved access to the world and ever-changing technology allows photographers to reveal the invisible, to capture more intricate detail and more unanticipated moments than ever before. At the same time, wild animals are facing unprecedented threats to their survival. Habitat loss, climate change, the illegal wildlife trade, overfishing, and pollution which has caused a catastrophic decline of Sri Lanka's amazingly diverse flora and fauna across the island's landscapes.

Wildlife Photography has the power to turn people on to the wonder of nature

In case you've bought yourself the snazziest new smartphone on the market with a triple lens set up or added a new 600 mm lens with an enviable zoom to appreciate the finer details to your collection of lenses and got itchy feet to explore and encounter the wonders of the wild on a series of long weekends this year inside Sri Lanka's National Parks, the excitement is real. Sri Lanka's wilderness, biodiversity and accessibility presents itself like Pandora's Box. No one can deny the thrill of that perfect photograph. It captures the beauty of the moment, evidence of a memorable encounter,

when the leopard yawned in your face and proceeded to enjoy a back rub against the Palu tree or a troop of baby wild boars tripped each other in excitement as they followed their mum through a forest patch after the sunset. With unprecedented new tools, opportunities and reach to moments in the wild, there is one essential that every wildlife photographer must pack in with their gear though; ethics.

So what does it mean to be an Ethical Wildlife Photographer?

"The ethics of photography are the same as the ethics of life, and all revolve around respect," says National Geographic photographer Beverly Joubert, who has spent decades photographing African wildlife. Every wildlife photographer must be guided by compassion and conservation and put the welfare of the subject first. It is essential to develop an appreciation of each living organism and their part in the intricate webs that set the stage and create the beautiful landscapes and 'big wildlife moments' that are viewed through their mirror/mirrorless DSLR lens.

Bridge the gap between science and photography to add authenticity to what you're doing

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Whilst it's important to upskill and hone your skills through photography workshops and tutorials, take the time to dive deeper into the biology, the history, the diversity of Sri Lanka's National Parks and Biodiversity. Attend lectures and conservation workshops, partner with scientists, researchers and field experts to develop a depth of knowledge. It will inevitably be reflected in every frame captured and ensure what you're posting is accurate.

The Wildlife Nature Protection Society (WNPS) launched the 'Ethical Photography in the Wild' campaign to create awareness and a much needed conversation on ethics amongst wildlife photographers, travellers and the general community. It aspires to create a paradigm shift with a special focus on safari photography in Sri Lanka's national parks amongst multiple stakeholders, ranging from tourists and travel influencers to jeep drivers, naturalists and guides.

Ethical Wildlife Photography is a powerful tool for conservation

A single photo can go viral on social media in mere minutes, bringing much-needed attention to wildlife in the throes of crisis. It places a sense of responsibility on every wildlife photographer to show and tell honest stories. A chance to instigate real change, action conservation and advocate for the wondrous subjects you photograph. These basic principles provide a starting point.



If there's one main takeaway to the field - *a photographer must exercise good judgement and, when in doubt, wildlife should always get the benefit of that doubt.*

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WNPS is honoured to partner with Nation Trust

Bank and the creativity of SARVA for this campaign.



About the writer:

Vihangi is a writer and conservationist with an insatiable appetite for all things 'Sri Lanka'. She enjoys travelling and trying to live a more sustainable life and loves to combine the two, whenever possible.

**this article first appeared in the morning on the 25th of January 2022*