



Drive Out PHOTO MECHANIC

EDITED BY VILLIERS STEYN

Give animal pics personality

The internet, social networks and web galleries are awash with wildlife pictures. But sharp focus or well-exposed subjects are not the only elements that make a picture striking. Pictures with personality are the ones that stand out.



Picture of the month

'I use Aquafresh'

Hanz Zwiegers

Canon 7D camera and Canon 100-400 mm lens
(settings: F5.6, 1/800 sec, ISO 400)

"I love taking pictures of animals, because it gets me outdoors. I took this picture last year March in the Addo Elephant National Park near the Woodlands waterhole. It's the national park closest to my home and I visit it about ten times a year.

"I particularly like watching the interaction of the animals. In time you learn their habits so that you can get your camera ready in time to take good pictures.

"Zebras usually look very lazy, but it looks like this one is having a good laugh."

Villiers' response:

Anyone who spends any time on the *Drive Out* Campfire forum knows Hanz Zwiegers takes serious wildlife pictures. This comical zebra picture is Hanz's second contribution to Photo Mechanic and it immediately drew my attention. But what is it that makes this picture so striking?

Find animals with personality

We've all seen thousands of pictures of maned lions in the Kalahari, kingfishers on a branch and elephants at a waterhole. We are bombarded daily on Facebook and other web galleries with similar images.

Although there's nothing wrong with that kind of picture, they sometimes look like the pictures in a fashion pamphlet: mostly posed.

Hanz's picture isn't even remotely in that category. By photographing an animal as simple as a zebra at the right moment, you can quickly transform an otherwise "boring" picture into one with character.

The expression on this zebra's face gives it loads of personality, and now you

immediately have a bond between the animal and the viewer.

You now wonder: what is this guy laughing at? Or is he perhaps singing Whitney Houston's "I will always love you" at the top of his voice?

Complete the sentence

The moment you want to put a speech bubble next to an animal's mouth, or at least want to add sound effects to its facial expression, you've succeeded in capturing its personality.

Take this picture of a lioness, for example:



she may be chasing flies off her face, but she does rather look as if she had too many springbokkies the night before ("Never again...") or perhaps her sister is hunting a porcupine ("This could end badly...").

Give yourself the best chance

It's not always easy to capture such an entertaining picture, but someone like Hanz endeavours to create the right opportunities.

Firstly, he spends a lot of time in the veld. The more time you spend with animals, the better you get to know their behaviour and habits, and the better your chance of capturing an entertaining moment.

Secondly, Hanz doesn't only take one picture at a time, but rather a few in a row (continuous shooting), which increases the possibility of taking a characterful picture.

Finally, Hanz uses a beanbag on his vehicle window to ensure that his long 100-400 mm lens is well anchored and immobile while he takes pictures.

We're looking forward to seeing many more of your wildlife pictures on the forum, Hanz. Thanks for sharing it with us.