



Ready for your close-up?

If you use a zoom lens to photograph an animal, you can take great portraits. The secret is in knowing where to focus.

Patience is rewarded

 Picture of the month

George van Deventer

Canon 7D camera and Canon 100–400 mm zoom lens (settings: F5.6, 1/160 sec, ISO 400)

“When we travel to Kasane in Botswana, we usually camp at Elephant Sands Lodge for a night or two. It’s affordable, the service is excellent and the food is superb.

“The highlight, however, is seeing the elephants that come to drink here all day. Sometimes you see up to 200 in a day, from old bulls to tiny calves. I took the picture of this little guy in October last year.

“I’m particularly fond of taking animal portraits; I’ll sit and wait for hours for that ‘perfect picture’.”



Villiers says:

This little elephant has tons of personality. It looks as if it’s obediently opening its mouth for the dentist, and doesn’t seem bothered by George’s presence.

Getting this close to wild animals is just great, and I have yet to find a place that offers better photo opportunities than Elephant Sands, especially during Botswana’s dry season (June to October).

Water for elephants

I happened to spend two nights at Elephant Sands, 50km north of Nata on the Kasane road, in October last year. It was my first visit, and I couldn’t believe that wild elephants were waiting for their drinking water so nonchalantly and so close to me. Some were less than 5m away... with-



out a fence between us!

Here, it’s all about mutual respect between man and animal. The staff pump fresh water into a trough for the elephants, and the guests are rewarded with unparalleled photo opportunities.

We were glued to our seats by the waterhole for two days.

It’s all in the eyes

George’s picture has a number of good qualities: It’s taken in beautiful golden light; it has a shallow depth of field, which makes the baby elephant stand out; and George managed to capture the little guy’s “smile”.

An animal picture showing personality can be striking.

The only thing I can nitpick about is that the depth of field (at F5.6) is a tad too shallow, so the eyes are not in focus. Remember, the lower your F-stop value, the shallower the depth of field.

When I photograph an animal’s face, I try to focus on the eyes – the centre of attention – and then I pick a slightly higher F-stop (usually F8) to ensure

the animal’s entire face is in focus and the background is still blurred.

If possible, wait until the animal looks in the right direction and blinks. See the example below of a kudu bull I photographed in the Kruger. 

