



Drive Out PHOTO MECHANIC

BY VILLIERS STEYN

Ready for action!

The better you know your camera and its setting, the better chance you have of capturing the action when animals do something out of the ordinary.



Photo of the month

Tails between their legs

J.I. de Wet

Canon 20D camera and Canon 75 300 mm lens (F5.6, 1/320 sec, ISO 800)

"My wife Talita and I try to visit the Kruger National Park at least four times a year.

"We were on the S65 gravel road just west of Skukuza when we encountered a breeding herd of elephants on the banks of the N'waswitsbaka River. It was the picture of tranquillity until a pack of African wild dogs showed up.

"The dogs were mischievous and kept teasing the elephants. When the elephants finally got fed up, they crowded



round and started to chase the pack down the road in our direction.

"I don't know where the emotions were

running higher, inside or outside our vehicle! It was one of those once-in-a-lifetime sightings."

Villiers says:

Some readers might remember J.I. from the series of articles about the Serengeti that I wrote in 2011 – he was my touring partner (*Drive Out* #28 – #35). When he showed me this photo, I decided it had to be shared with more people. When you least expect it, you, too, may have such as one-off game-viewing experience, and when it happens you need to be ready to capture it on camera.

The secret...

When a professional mountain biker sets out on a ride in the mountains, he doesn't just get on his bike and start cycling. He first ensures his tyres are inflated and that he has a tyre repair kit and water with him.

Similarly, you need to run through a mental checklist before you go on a game drive. Are the batteries charged? Do I have enough space on the memory card? Which lens would be the best one to use? What's the quality of the light and how would it influence my camera's settings? The better prepared you are, the better your chance of capturing the action.

Have a look, for example, at the photo of a family of Egyptian geese that waddled



across a road in the Pilanesberg Game Reserve. I had only about a minute to capture the whole family in the road.

High ISO and low F-stop

J.I. was certainly prepared. It was early morning when they saw this dramatic scene, so he ran the risk of getting a set of dark, blurred photos because low light normally means a slow shutter speed.

Before the action, J.I. raised his ISO to 800 to ensure he got a high shutter speed – and thus sharp photos. He used aperture priority (instead of automatic) and selected the lowest possible F-stop (F5.6) to let in the

maximum amount of light.

The result is a photo that is slightly grainy as a result of the relatively high ISO. All the animals are not in focus because of the shallow depth of field at F5.6. The little that is in focus, however, is sharp and the lighting is good for this time of day.

Take a course

Sign up for a beginner's course in digital photography and learn how to use all the buttons and dials on your camera. If you live in or near Pretoria, I offer courses – visit www.visionphoto.co.za/photography_courses.html to find out more.