

With Five Questions

- conversations with creative professionals in business and the arts -

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 28, 2013

Meet Mario Fazekas, Wildlife Photographer and Author

Mario Fazekas is a wildlife photographer and the owner of Kruger-2-Kalahari.com. He has spent over 700 days on photo safaris in African National Parks such as the Kruger Park, Kgalagadi, and Pilanesberg in South Africa; Etosha in Namibia; plus Ngorongoro Crater and Lake Manyara in Tanzania. Mario is the author of the [Photographer's Guide series of how-to photo e-books](#): *The Photographer's Guide to Etosha National Park* and *The Photographer's Guide to the Pilanesberg National Park*, both of which have been rated A+ by Apogee Photo Magazine.



1. When did you first become interested in wildlife photography, and how have your interests evolved over time?

My wife dragged me kicking and screaming to the Kruger National Park back in 1995 and from that initial trip as a day visitor, we have visited the various southern African parks and game reserves every year for our annual vacations and free weekends!

I started out with a Kodak point and shoot camera, realized that was insufficient and then progressed to a Minolta SLR and finally a Nikon DSLR system.

Initially I was interested in photographing mammals, such as the "big-five" as they are large and therefore easier to shoot, but I have now developed an interest in macro photography, photographing birds in flight and also landscapes.

2. What are some of the unique challenges in taking safari photographs?

In order to return home from an African safari with impressive images four things have to happen:

- You need to find the subjects! If you cannot locate animals there will be nothing to photograph.
- Be prepared to get up early! If you want to capture landscape and animal photographs with impact, you need to make the most of the blue hours (the hour before sunrise and the hour after sunset) and the golden hours (the two hours after sunrise and the two hours before sunset). You can sleep in at home, but while on safari you must be up and ready when the animals are most active and the light has the most impact and mood.
- You should know a bit about your subjects. You don't have to be an expert in African animals, but know a little about their habitats and behaviours.
- You need to be aware of your position in relation to the subject and the light source. Photography is known as "painting with light," so you must use your light source wisely.



3. What inspired you to share your knowledge in e-book format, and what has the response been to your books?

In 18 years we have captured over 300,000 images on film and digital. We started going through them a few years back and realized that our nature photographs had improved consistently year after year and that we had learned many, many lessons that would also help other photographers improve their skills.

We were going to publish traditional books but the publishers were so dictatorial that we decided to self-publish.

In our e-books, or site guides as they are also known, we share our proven strategies for finding elusive and/or exciting animals such as leopards, wild dogs, cheetahs, etc. We also provide advice on how best to use your photo gear, animal hot spots, advice on lighting at the waterholes and camps as well as photographing at night--basically, solutions to the challenges that most wildlife photographers will face while on safari.

We realised that there was a gap in the book market as there are many coffee-table books with lovely wildlife images and there are also many books on general photography, but not much providing detailed advice for visitors to specific national parks. A lion in Botswana's Chobe National Park may have different behaviors to an Etosha lion that in turn may have different habits to a Kruger Park lion in South Africa and so forth.

Our e-books are for all levels of photographers, from amateur to professional and for self-drive or guided safaris. The plan is that when you arrive at an area covered in these e-books, you'll know where to go when and what to expect and you will know what equipment and techniques will be most effective. Even field guides tell us that they learn a lot from these books!

What usually happens is that visitors waste valuable time getting to know the parks and animals and by the time they start getting "acclimatized" to the animals' current locations and habits, it's time for the visitors to go home! These e-books will prepare the visitor so that from the first day you arrive at the parks, you can be photographing the key animal species like a veteran.

The response to our e-books has been great! We have converted the Etosha e-book to [Amazon's Kindle format](#) and are in the process of doing the same for the Pilanesberg site guide, so people have a choice of buying either the PDF or Kindle version. We are finalising our ***Kgalagadi*** and ***Kruger*** e-books that will be available at the beginning of 2014 and we already have a list of people wanting to purchase them!



4. What do you suggest that photographers do to brush up their photography skills at home before going on safari?

Many amateur and even advanced photographers think that new photo gear is the answer to improving their photographs. We agree that photo gear is important but it is only one half of the solution--the other half is photographic vision or creativity. Many photographers become obsessed with "how" they capture the image (photo gear) and exclude the "why" (the photographic vision) and that is to the detriment of the "what" or end result.

Therefore my advice to photographers is that they should firstly read the key parts of their camera manuals and then actually go and use their cameras at the zoo, at home, or at an air show. We are amazed at how many people buy a new camera and then come on safari without having read even the quick-start guide and without having used the gear. Wildlife action can happen very fast, and photographers must know their cameras and lenses if they want to respond in time and capture good images.

Secondly they should read books and interviews by professional photographers, especially books written by Freeman Patterson and David DuChemin who are both masters of photographic vision. In addition, they should try and buy site guides to the specific national parks that they will be visiting as these books will provide explicit advice and not just general photographic advice. We are not the first photographers to publish e-books specific to certain parks. For example, Arthur Morris, the world's premier bird photographer, has published some excellent site guides for the various American parks and reserves.

5. If you could give photographers just a couple of pieces of advice before booking a safari trip, what would that advice be?

To focus on what we term the "five-P's." In addition to the first two P's of **Preparation** and **Practice**, which must be done at home before coming on safari and that we discussed in the previous question, you need to have these three additional traits, making up the 5-P's:

- You must have a **Purpose** in mind before booking your destination. If you want to shoot as many mammals as possible, filling up your memory cards every day, then you should be going to Namibia's Etosha Park in winter. If you want to photograph birds and wildflowers, then you should be going to the Kruger Park or Kgalagadi in summer and so on. You should also try to be more of a "*situation-driven*" photographer as opposed to a "*subject-driven*" photographer--if you want to photograph a cheetah, but you come across a black-backed jackal hunting doves and the light is good, stop and photograph the jackal as you may not find the cheetahs that day.
- Nature has its own time and you will see and photograph much more if you have **Patience** and spend time at bird-hides or waterholes instead of looking for just a few seconds and then driving on. Take some coffee and rusks with you in the mornings or some sun-downers in the afternoons--let the action come to you, which will make sitting and waiting much more enjoyable!
- Finally, **Passion** will keep you motivated and disciplined in terms of the other four P's. If you are not enthusiastic about nature photography, you will tend to sleep in, miss the good light and go home with few, if any, "wow" photographs.

