

ETHICS STATEMENT

The 2009 Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition sparked a massive ethical debate. The winner that year was of a Wolf jumping a gate. The competition judges met again and after consultation, came to the conclusion that the picture contained, a wolf that was not a wild individual. This was against the rules of the competition and the first winner was stripped of his prize.

This one event sparked a debate on the ethical standards of all Wildlife Photographers. Letters and articles appearing in the press after this incident highlighted that the Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition is not the only place where photographs of a less than high ethical standard have appeared.

We have looked at photographs in magazines, and wonder just how they were taken and was the subject wild or captive? Looking at the captions accompanying the images is no guide as to whether a captive or wild subject appears in the picture. We will always make it clear to the users of our images, if the subject was captive. However; sometimes this information gets overlooked. What we do have control over, is how the photographs are taken in the first place.

As wildlife photographers we have a responsibility to protect the fauna and flora we photograph. Since we started, we have worked to our own set of ethical standards. These we believe protect wildlife and the environment. We thought that our personal standards, professional reputation and integrity were enough to protect our subjects. It has, become apparent to us, that a few individual wildlife photographers have brought suspicion on everyone.

We have taken the decision to formalise the ethics and guidelines we set ourselves in a written document. This is a first for us, to have a published set of standards. Until now we have always mutually agreed, how we would work and what we would and would not do to get a picture. Now with all wildlife photographers being looked upon with suspicion by the general public, we want to ensure

everyone knows how we work and what we find acceptable. This statement lets you know how we conduct ourselves and take our pictures.

We are wildlife photographers, our aim is to photograph wild subjects that are able to follow a wild existence. If they choose to appear in front of our cameras, it is their choice. This is our preferred method when taking photographs.

If we do take pictures of captive animals we satisfy ourselves these animals are properly cared for. They must have the freedom not to be photographed by moving away from us. The people looking after them must be knowledgeable and accountable for the animal's welfare. We try to use captive animals as little as possible. When we do, we prefer animals being held for captive breed programs or are unable to be released back into the wild.

Recuperating animals that are awaiting release are an issue for us. We have to be assured that our contact does not jeopardise or delay their release. If we have any doubts we contact relevant welfare organisations for their clarification and guidance.

It is difficult to draw a distinction between different species of animals held in captivity. Should some be captive while others should not? It is a debate that continues and changes as our understanding changes. In the real world distinctions are made about what it is acceptable to keep in captivity and what is not. We have strong views on the whole issue and this is why we continue to choose not to photograph many species held in captive collections. Our view is; our photographs



could contribute to those species continuing to be held in captivity. So we choose not to photograph them.

Country sports such as hunting, fishing and shooting have large tracts of land dedicated to their pursuit in the UK. The fine balance of conservation and protection these sports afford our countryside, go hand in hand with abuses committed by individuals in pursuit of their sport. Birds and animals breed purely for sport are an ethical dilemma for us. We recognise the good done by people engaged in the sports, whilst condemning the few who step over the line of acceptability. We have taken many pictures on sporting estates and have enjoyed the diversity that their stewardship has brought about. We have satisfied ourselves that these estates work to the highest possible standards of animal husbandry and wildlife welfare.

We review each time we take pictures of captive species using the criteria above. Our choosing to photograph a captive species is only a last resort or when our photographs, will illustrate good practices.

All our pictures of captive animals are labelled as such. The caption and keywords electronically embedded in the image have the word "captive" to designate that the animal was not wild at the time the picture was taken. We actively encourage all our clients when captioning or accrediting, to note that the subject was captive.

Researching a target species is an important step for us, before venturing out into the field. It enables us to identify behaviours such as courtship, mating, flowering and dormant periods in the species we are trying to photograph. We also research non-targeted species found in the same environment. Our aim is to understand as much as possible and to cause as little disruption by our actions. Disturbing an animal at certain critical times of the year, could lead to lessening that individual's chance of survival.

Travelling to other areas and countries to take wildlife pictures brings about other considerations. Understanding our local patch gives us insight into the species present, how weather and local conditions are affecting them. When we travel to new areas we consult with published works and knowledgeable local experts to better understand the local conditions. Extreme or unusual weather, human interference, local population performance can all affect the species we are trying to photo-

graph. If we understand these influences, it allows us to be sympathetic to the population and reduce our possible impact.

Drought may cause local species problems. Just the fact of being between them and a water source could tip the balance of survival. We always take local advice and wherever practical consult or hire local guides who understand the environment.

Taking pictures of plants can be a very difficult ethical area. What we don't want to do is to take photographs of one species and destroy another. Whenever you photograph plants, there always seems to be a wayward bit of foliage, just in the wrong place. This leads to what is termed gardening or the removal of the bits of unwanted greenery. We never cut or up root live material to get our picture. If we can't carefully bend the offending foliage out of the way it is better to move to another specimen or not get the picture.

Disturbing plants and foliage to get a picture is kept to a minimum and when we have finished the vegetation is returned to its natural position. Ensuring the micro-climate that existed before we arrived is returned. Not matter if this gardening for plant photograph or moving branches out of the way to get a better angle with a long lens, we always take the same care.

Legal protection for wildlife in this country is very good. We work to maintain a working knowledge of all the relevant acts pertaining to the work we carry out. When travelling to different parts of the world we try and understand and comply with local laws and customs. We always conduct ourselves to our understanding of these acts and laws, at all times.

Digital photography has given photographers the opportunity to modify images subsequent to the shutter being pressed. The famous cases of the moving pyramids or the additional Zebras have made headline news in the press. We take pictures of wildlife. If it isn't in the picture when we pressed the shutter it's not in the picture you see.

Retouching is kept to a minimum. We do retouch images removing dust spots and the odd stray bit of debris. Sometimes we crop our images to remove unwanted distractions. We will also remove things like the odd wing tip or spare tail at the edge of the frame in groups of animals and birds, as long as it is at the edges. We do this, as it is sometimes very difficult to make sure that all



your subjects are completely in the frame when you press the shutter. Occasionally we will improve the catch lights in the eyes of our subjects, making them brighter. But, we never add catch lights to the eyes of our subject.

Our rule is, if we have made substantial changes to the picture, such as changing colours or adding substantially to the mood of the photograph.

We include in the caption and keywords the words "digitally altered" or "artistic interpretation" depending on how much of the image people see has been changed from the original photograph.

We do wildlife photography because it is our passion. We like to think that our passion is reflected in the pictures we take. We always hope that our pictures will inspire people to move closer to wildlife and the natural world. So when we meet people, out enjoying nature, it is our belief that

they should be allowed get as much pleasure as we do. Therefore, we treat other people as we would wish to be treated. If we can help or enable people to better understand the world about them, we believe that this is as important as taking photographs.

There is a saying that we find to be very apt.

"Live today as if it were you last; treat the environment, as if you will live forever".

All our efforts are directed into two areas. Taking beautiful wildlife photographs and ensuring that wildlife is preserved for other people to see and enjoy. Better to walk away without the picture than put at risk any part of the natural world. If we cannot work without deceit then it is better that we find something else to do with our lives.

Mark and Jacky Bloomfield

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