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Newsletter from Kim Westerskov

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Newsletter #63 – March 2018

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This newsletter goes out to many photographers in New Zealand and overseas - and to anybody who asks to be on the mailing list. If you know anybody who would like to join the mailing list, please get them to email me. It's free and they can unsubscribe at any time, of course.



Cosy Nook, Southland. Foveaux Coastal Forecast: "GALE WARNING IN FORCE. Southwest 25 knots rising to 35 knots, gusting 50 knots. Sea becoming rough. Southwest swell rising to 8 metres. Poor visibility in showers."

1. ZOO PHOTOGRAPHY

with some tips for your general photography as well

As many of you know, we had a great day at Hamilton Zoo recently, with 100 or so keen photographers turning up for the “Day at the Zoo”: 70 registered photographers [who all went in the draws for good prizes] and another 30 or so who just came along to enjoy the day.

The “Day at the Zoo” has become an established highlight of the photographic year for photographers living within driving distance of Hamilton. The day is organized by Hamilton’s Snapshot [Graham, Jill and Dion] and Canon New Zealand. The team from Canon was there to lend equipment from their extensive range of Canon gear, and I was along to contribute some tips about zoo photography and to lead several photo walks.



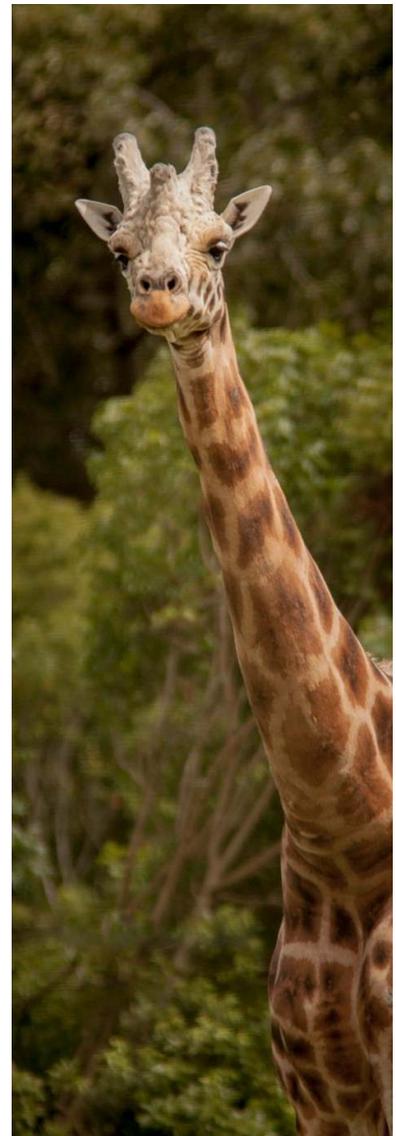
When Gareth and Anne [my children] were young, we drove over from Tauranga several times just to visit the Hamilton Zoo. That was long ago, so to reacquaint myself with the zoo I drove over a few days before the event. The photos accompanying this article [other than the group photo] were all taken during 1 ½ hours there.

I wrote the following about zoo photography specifically, but also covering general photographic principles which apply to both wildlife photography and zoo photography. It was printed and made available as a handout on the day:

Zoo photography is rewarding and fun. At a zoo, you should not be after just “snaps”, but something much better: really good photos - photos with impact, photos that capture a special moment, with good composition, good light etc. Not all of your zoo photos will be great, maybe only a few, but that’s what you should aim for. Personally, I’d much rather come home from a day’s shooting with three “great” photos than 300 “OK” ones.

Here’s some tips for successful zoo photography:

1. Have an overall **plan** for the day, even if it’s nothing more than a short list of the animals you’d most like to spend time with. My list would include tigers, giraffes, zebras, monkeys and lemurs.
2. Having said that, be **flexible**. You may be hoping for good photos of red pandas today, but if they are hiding and the lemurs are looking good, then shoot lemurs.
3. **Lens choice**: a telephoto lens anywhere in the 100-400mm range will usually get you close enough for intimate photos. My photos were taken with a Canon 5D Mark II and a Canon 300mm f4L lens,



sometimes with 1.4X and 2.0X extenders, giving me focal lengths of 420mm and 600mm. All were handheld.

- 4. Technical stuff: Image Stabilization** [Vibration Reduction] should be "On", unless you are using a tripod. Don't be afraid of using a higher ISO than normal. Most modern cameras give remarkably good results at higher ISOs, and the little bit of extra noise is usually dealt with satisfactorily in Photoshop/Lightroom. My giraffe and zebra photos were taken at ISOs between 400 - 800, the tiger photos between ISO 1600 - 3200. **Shutter speed:** high enough to freeze any movement.



- 5. More technical stuff: Manual or Auto** or Aperture Priority or Shutter Priority? Whatever you're most comfortable with. There's no point in using Manual unless you've had a lot of practise and really know what you're doing.



- 6. Backgrounds.** Zoos are not the natural habitats for these animals, obviously. You have two choices here: either incorporate the enclosures as part of the photo [i.e. the photo is obviously taken in a zoo] or try to minimize the background so the photos don't scream "zoo" at you. You can achieve the latter by using any or all of the following techniques: move yourself around &/or wait until the animal is in front of a natural-looking background, use your telephoto lens at wide apertures [f2.8, f4, f5.6] which throw the background out of focus, also waiting for the times when there is significant separation between the animal and the background [throwing the background further out of focus].



- 7. Cages, netting.** My zebra photos were all taken through wire netting. The technique is simple: use a telephoto lens, stand as close to the netting as possible [even touching it is OK] with clear air between the animal and the centre of your lens, shooting at a wide aperture e.g. f2.8, f4, f5.6.



- 8. Glass.** Yes, you can happily shoot through glass as well. Best to stand close. A trip to Photoshop may be needed to increase the contrast. All the tiger photos I took were through glass. Try to find glass in the shade. Glass with sunlight falling directly on it is a bit like photographing through a filter made of milk.





9. **Eyes.** As with people, eyes are the most important part of every animal. Mostly [unless you're just photographing some of the textures, colour patterns or body parts of an animal] you need to be able to see the eyes. And the eyes must be sharp. Every time.
10. **The whole animal or just part of it?** You're not photographing for a book on identifying each species, you're a creative photographer, you're trying to create photos that make you go "Wow!". That make others go "Wow!". "Wow!" photos often break "the rules". Often just part of an animal or the relationships between parts of 2+ animals work well.
11. **"The moment" & motor drives.** The best shots are usually when the animal is doing something. There is often a "decisive moment", not always easy to predict beforehand, so your motor drive will greatly increase the odds of capturing "The Moment". Shoot away! Choose later.
12. **Get in close.** Get yourself as close as you can, then use your telephoto lens to get even closer, and then later – if you need to be even closer still – crop the extraneous background out in Lightroom/Photoshop. Cropping is fine – I do it all the time. For many or most animal photos you're wanting a simple composition – just the animal, or its face, with little or no extraneous background.
13. **Powerful images are usually simple images.** There's nothing extra, nothing distracting. Photographers often don't notice the distracting stuff in the background when they are getting the shot [their attention is fully on the subject]. They only notice it later, if at all.
14. Getting good photos at zoos is easy. **Set yourself a new goal for your next zoo visit** – not "OK" or "good" shots but "great" shots. And don't worry if you get lots of duds. Every wildlife/animal photographer who is trying to get great shots will get lots of duds [fails, rejects]. They don't matter in the slightest. They are easy to delete from your hard drive later. What really matters is that you are striving for – and getting – some great shots.
15. **Patience.** Every successful wildlife photographer is a patient photographer. My approach to getting the accompanying photos was [1] to pick just a few animals to photograph, the ones that appealed most. Then [2] spend some real time with each. I spent 45 minutes with the giraffes and zebras and over half an hour with the tiger [I would have spent longer but the zoo closed for the day]. In both cases, nothing much happened for the first 5 - 10 minutes and then [in the case of the zebras] a group of zebras came in close to where I was standing. One rolled over on its back. The giraffes were hundreds of metres away mostly, but a long lens allowed me to get good group shots. Then, after I'd been there half an hour, one individual walked straight towards the feeding station in front of me, closer and closer until all I could see in the viewfinder was the giraffe's head.



2. FROM KIM'S FIELD DIARIES – FOVEAUX STRAIT STORM

Riverton, Southland. 23rd June. Winter. Foveaux Coastal Forecast: "GALE WARNING IN FORCE. Southwest 25 knots rising to 35 knots, gusting 50 knots. Sea becoming rough. Southwest swell rising to 8 metres. Poor visibility in showers."

Music to my ears! I've loved photographing storms for many years, as long as I'm standing somewhere reasonably safe. Sometimes the photography was just to get me out on the deck to counteract seasickness during rough passages, but once I realized there weren't many good photos of stormy seas available, I chased stormy seas as one of my photographic niches.

Some of my most widely published photos over the years have been taken in storms at sea, including the cover of "South" by Ernest Shackleton, Penguin Books 1999 <https://www.fishpond.co.nz/Books/South-Sir-Ernest-Henry-Shackleton/9780241966723> and the cover of "The Perfect Storm" [first paperback edition, also current Kindle edition <https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/B004APA538>

I was staying with Dave and Dawn Asher on their farm just outside Riverton, west of Invercargill. The previous week Dave had chartered a Cessna from Southern Air [now called Stewart Island Flights] for a photographic flight around pretty much the entire coastline of Rakiura Stewart Island, circling around anything that needed circling around [Gog, Magog,





fishing boats]. I took lots of good photos of a wonderful island. We were now waiting for the weather to clear for a helicopter trip to Solander Island where we'd be landing for filming [Dave] and photography [me].

But not today or tomorrow. I borrowed Dave's ute and headed west towards Cosy Nook, arriving on dusk to see huge swells marching in from the Southern Ocean in a full-on assault on the coastline. Sea foam was being pushed into the normally-placid bay and blown up the beach.



Next day I stayed until dark [dark comes early in midwinter in Southland]. The weather was surly and bleak, heavily overcast with squalls of gale-driven rain. The sun broke through just once, briefly, as a huge swell enveloped a rock known locally as Castle Rock [photo at right]. Red-billed gulls hunkered down on a low nearby islet – no flying today. The cab of Dave's ute is not much taller than me but when I stood on the downwind side I stayed dry during the squalls – rain usually falls downwards but here it was coming sideways. "Good day Kim?" "Excellent, thanks Dave".



3. "FORESTS, FERNS & FLOWERS" photo workshop – Sunday 25th March

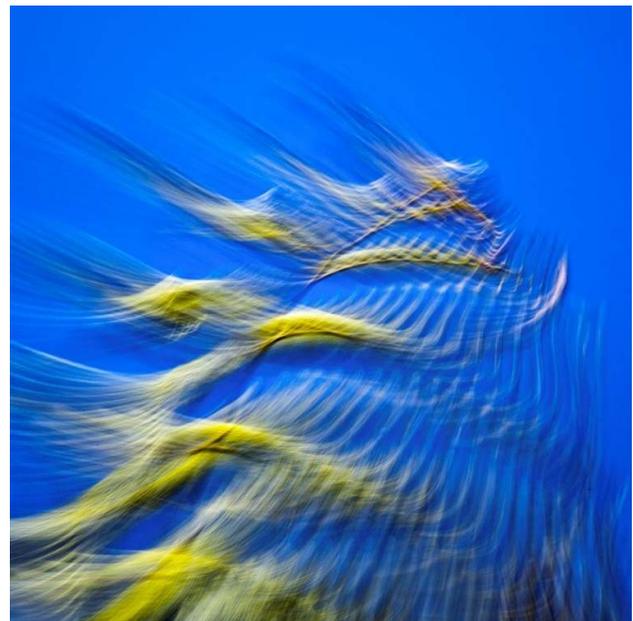


Sunday 25th March: 9.00am – 5.00pm plus assignment and follow-up evening 2-3 weeks later for assignment evaluation [at a time that suits everyone]. The follow-up can be by email.

“Hands up everybody who would like to create inspirational images of the wonderful plant world: from the silent green majesty of our tallest native forests to the small purple native orchids [plus the flowers in your garden]?”

“Ah, yes, I thought so”. Well, here’s your chance to learn the techniques I’ve developed over the last 25 years to not just document our forests, ferns and flowers, but to go beyond documentary and into the realm of inspirational art. The kind that make you feel good. The kind you want to get printed, mounted, framed, and then hang on your wall.

Getting “snaps” of forests or flowers is easy – the trees never move. Flowers don’t either - they just sit there looking gorgeous. But fresh, creative imagery is a completely different ball game, and the answers aren’t always easy. Especially forests – for the first 20 years of trying, I was not happy with my forest photos. Somewhere in the act of pressing the shutter, most of the forest’s magic somehow just vanished. “Poof” – it disappeared like a puff of smoke dissipated by the wind. But I kept at it and eventually developed techniques that somehow retained – at least to my





eyes – some of the magic. I'll pass these hard-won techniques on to you if/when I see you on the 25th.

Years ago, I liberated many young tree ferns from pine plantations, and gave them new homes around my office down at the back of our property here. They thrived and became yet another source of wonder and inspiration for me. I now have enough imagery for a photographic book dedicated to tree ferns: "A Love of Tree Ferns". Maybe next year. Let me share some of their magic with you, and the techniques I used.

This workshop will approach the photography from two different, but complementary directions: both documentary photos ["real photos"] and artistic, impressionistic imagery.





Cost: The full course fee [which includes tuition, hand-outs, Vivienne's yummy catering, assignment and follow-up] is **\$295**, dropping to \$245 for Early Birds if you register by 18th March. Fulltime students with ID \$150.



4. 2018 PROGRAMME

MARCH

- **Sunday 25th March. “Forests, Ferns, Flowers & Fotos” workshop.** Full day plus follow-up.

APRIL

- Tuesday 3rd April. “Photos & Coffee” informal meeting. 7.00 – 10.00pm. Free.
- **Saturday 21st April. “Wide Angle & Telephoto” workshop.** Full day plus follow-up.

MAY

- Tuesday 1st May. “Photos & Coffee” informal meeting. 7.00 – 10.00pm. Free.
- **Sunday 20th May. “Photo Essentials” workshop.** Full day plus follow-up.

JUNE

- Tuesday 5th June. “Photos & Coffee” informal meeting. 7.00 – 10.00pm. Free.
- **Saturday 9th June. “People” workshop.** Portraits, kids, families, street/travel, weddings. Full day plus follow-up.

JULY

- Tuesday 3rd July. “Photos & Coffee” informal meeting. 7.00 – 10.00pm. Free.
- **Sunday 8th July. “Landscapes” workshop.** Full day plus follow-up.

AUGUST

- **Saturday 4th August. “Composition & Light” workshop.** Full day plus follow-up.
- Tuesday 7th August. “Photos & Coffee” informal meeting. 7.00 – 10.00pm. Free.
- **Saturday 25th August. “Getting started in Lightroom”.** Half day.

SEPTEMBER

- Tuesday 4th September. “Photos & Coffee” informal meeting. 7.00 – 10.00pm. Free.
- **Sunday 23rd September. “Good photos, great photos – anytime, anywhere”** workshop. Full day plus follow-up.

OCTOBER

- Tuesday 2nd October. “Photos & Coffee” informal meeting. 7.00 – 10.00pm. Free.
- **Saturday-Sunday 13-14 October. “Great Photography Weekend” workshop.** Weekend + follow-up.

NOVEMBER

- Tuesday 6th November. “Photos & Coffee” informal meeting. 7.00 – 10.00pm. Free.
- **Saturday 17 November. “New worlds with your camera” workshop.** Full day plus follow-up.

DECEMBER

- Tuesday 4th December. “Photos & Coffee” informal meeting. 7.00 – 10.00pm. Free.

Half-day workshops 9.00am – 1.00pm

Full day & two-day workshops 9.00am – 5.00pm

COST: Course fees include tuition, detailed hand-outs, yummy catering, assignment and follow-up evenings for full and two day workshops.

- **Half day workshops:** \$135 – or \$115 for Early Birds if you register by 10 days before workshop. Fulltime students with ID \$70.

- **One day workshops:** \$295 – or \$245 for Early Birds if you register by 10 days before workshop. Fulltime students with ID \$150.
- **Weekend workshops:** \$475 [\$425 Early Bird]. Fulltime students with ID \$235.

5 . QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“Photography is a love affair with life”

Burk Uzzle

6. PHOTOSHOPPING, PHOTO RESTORATION

As well as teaching photography and mentoring photographers, I also offer photo restoration, Photoshopping, and “Photographing your Artworks” services. \$50 per hour [we usually get a lot done each hour].

7. INVITATION TO ALL CAMERA CLUBS & GROUPS

If your club or group might be interested in hosting one of my presentations - or workshops - or “Field Trip + Photo Critique” days, please get in touch.

8. COACHING, PRIVATE TUITION

Yes, like you I’m usually busy doing “other stuff” too, but I can nearly always fit private tuition in, and am very happy to do so. First 2 hours: \$80 per hour, after that \$70 per hour. If you come again, it’s \$70 per hour right from the first hour. Think not just about cost, but “value” – it’s one-on-one with an experienced photographer and teacher and we cover a lot each hour.

Or – for just the cost of a full-day workshop [with Early Bird discount] - \$245 – you get my full attention - one-on-one - for 4 hours. This can be out in the field or at my studio, looking at your photos on my computer, going over your camera functions, looking into specific techniques, or all of the above and more – whatever you want to do. I’m here for you. For only \$475 you have me for the whole day.

9. MENTORING

“Mentoring” is the ongoing process of **inspiring, advising, guiding, teaching, critiquing** ... whatever is needed for the ongoing development of a photographer. It’s one-on-one, so it’s different for each person. One month it may be about equipment or Photoshop, next month it may be “I just want my photos to have more ‘Wow’ in them”, the following month it may be about exhibitions or “Should I go pro?”. **Who is mentoring for? Anybody. I mentor both established professional photographers and amateurs.** Minimum of 6 months. Talk to Kim about what would work best for you.



Photos of Kim by Malcolm Macfarlane & Tony Whitehead

10. KIM'S PHOTOS & COFFEE EVENINGS

We meet on the first Tuesday of each month [every month of the year except January], chat informally about photography, and view some of the recent photos we've taken. It's **free [no charge], supper is served**, and there's no obligation of any kind. **Please email me if you'd like to come** [it's not a big room so I need to keep an eye on numbers]. These evenings are always fun and friendly - there's usually many smiles and laughs. It's a great way of meeting up with like-minded people, **being inspired by the creativity of our group of photographers, and coming away with news ideas and tips**. There's a wide range of interests and abilities – so for those of you who have not been before, you're very unlikely to feel out of your depth. Bring photos if you wish, but there's no obligation to bring any. Some people do, some don't.

The next one will be on Tuesday **3rd April**, starting 7.00pm. 18 Greerton Road, Gate Pa, Tauranga. Free, but please book by email.

11. ABOUT KIM

- **Passionate about photography and passionate about inspiring, guiding, and supporting photographers.**
- Over 30 years as a professional photographer
- Five First Prizes in the BBC "Wildlife Photographer of the Year" competition, the Oscars/Olympics of nature photography worldwide.
- 18 books published – written and photographed by me. Five are currently still "in print".
- Teaching photography for over 10 years now

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