

Wild about wildlife

Nature and landscape photographer Michael Snedic reveals why the animal world continues to inspire him



All images © Michael Snedic

Left

Green tree python

This green tree python was photographed on a cloudy day – nature’s diffuser. This stopped any overblown highlights

A meeting with nature and wildlife photographer Glen Threlfo almost two decades ago started Michael Snedic on the path of becoming a nature, wildlife and landscape photographer himself – and he's gone on to build a highly successful career. In this interview, he discusses the kit that he wouldn't leave home without, why he plans his shoots ahead of time and explains his top tips for photographic success.

Australian wildlife is diverse and sometimes dangerous. What challenges are you often presented with as a wildlife photographer in the field and how do you overcome these?
Not all of our wildlife is dangerous! For those that are, I always keep a respectful distance. I do my research beforehand and try to work out particular behavioural patterns that certain species might have. I also sometimes get together with professionals, such as park rangers, who assist me in finding species and know the wildlife quite well. In regards to risks, I don't take photos if there any kind of an inherent risk involved, as no photo is worth ending up in hospital for.

Do you have a favourite type of wildlife to photograph? What do you enjoy about this and where do you think is the best location to photograph them?

I do have a soft spot for birds. They come in every imaginable size, shape and colour and each species acts and reacts differently. With around 700 or so species, I certainly won't run out of subjects. There are many different habitats birds are found in, and one of my favourites is the regent bowerbird. I spent countless hours over a couple of years to get one particular shot of the bird flying right towards me. I loved the challenge and when it finally happened, it was very rewarding. Lamington National Park in Queensland, Australia is the best location to photograph the regent bowerbird.

What's your main advice to someone who wants to become a wildlife photographer?
Never, ever give up, even when things aren't happening for you. You need to have incredible patience when photographing wildlife – this is an absolute necessity.

What pieces of kit do you always carry with you and why?

I currently use a Nikon D800 as my main camera and take a spare camera body as a back-up. I was in Africa recently and my camera had problems, so the spare was an absolute lifesaver! For wildlife, I often use a fast lens (such as f2.8) where possible, especially in low-light conditions or when photographing moving animals. The lower the aperture, the faster the shutter speed.

I always take lots of spare memory cards with me and recommend fast cards when shooting wildlife on the continuous setting, so that images load faster. I make sure my batteries are fully charged before every shoot.

If you could only take one lens with you on a wildlife shoot, what would it be and why?
My Nikon 200-400mm f4 is hard to beat. It's got fast focusing and it's very sharp.

You lead workshops and tours – what do you enjoy about doing this and how important is this to the career of a professional wildlife photographer nowadays?
I absolutely love the fact that workshop participants often start a tour with limited photographic experience, but by the end they have learned how to use their camera, as well as gaining lots of new photographic tips and techniques. It's also a great feeling when you put together an itinerary, which highlights the most photogenic subjects and locations, and participants get a real buzz out of photographing them.

By leading photography tours, I'm constantly keeping up with the latest photographic gear as well as reinforcing the advice I'm teaching.

Do you consider yourself a wildlife photographer first and foremost?

As much as I also photograph landscapes and macro subjects, I'm better known as a wildlife photographer. I enjoy all three genres, but do enjoy wildlife photography that little bit more, especially when the individual puts on some amazing behavioural display and I'm there ready with my camera.

What sort of planning/research do you do before wildlife and landscape shoots?

With wildlife, I will often go and observe them prior to a shoot to see how they react, how close I can get to them and so on. I'll then head back better prepared on my shooting day.

With landscapes, I also try and do a recce, so that I know where it's best to position myself for the shoot. This is especially important if you are planning a sunrise shoot. It can be quite difficult arriving to a new location in the dark and using a headlamp or torch to try to find the best spot to position yourself for the shoot. Prior planning helps increase the odds of getting better images, as you will know exactly where to set up your gear.

What plans have you got for the future?

The future looks wonderful! I have a whole series of new natural locations and subjects that I'm going to visit with my camera – I just need to find the time in my busy work schedule. I am currently writing new photographic articles and sourcing various publishing opportunities.

Opposite-top
Horseshoe Falls

"Horseshoe Falls is my favourite waterfall in Australia. I love the lush, green moss and ferns, due to recent rains. I purposely waited for the right time of year (rainy season) to photograph the falls at its best"

Opposite-bottom-left
Humpback whale

"After six trips on a boat over a season, I managed to photograph this humpback whale breaching, using a continuous shooting mode"

Opposite-bottom-right
Luminous fungi

The image of this luminous fungi required a 12-minute exposure to capture the full effect of the glow. A sturdy tripod was essential to prevent any blur

Michael Snedic's career advice

How to turn photographing wildlife into a vocation

 It isn't easy becoming a professional, full-time wildlife/nature photographer such as myself. You need to be prepared to work in other fields to earn an income, while building up your photographic portfolio. It isn't easy, but it's well worth the effort!

 Learn your craft exceptionally well and put in the hours needed to become a skilled photographer.

 If you have a passion for a certain area in wildlife/nature photography, maybe concentrate on this area and become a specialist. Once you build up a decent portfolio, you can start marketing yourself as unique in this genre of photography and you will start making a name for yourself.

 Get some professional business and marketing advice before you invest time and money.

 If you believe in yourself that you will succeed, you are halfway there! A positive attitude will go a long way to becoming successful in business as a wildlife/nature photographer – or any other business, for that matter.

Right
Elephant

"As the elephant was walking towards us, I saw that it was going to be framed by a nearby tree. I waited until the second it was near the tree and at that moment its ear flapped up. Perfect timing!"





I am also planning new workshops and tours across Australia and Africa. In Australia, apart from presenting photographic tours to Tasmania and Lord Howe Island, I present tours to the Red Centre, Kangaroo Island, Norfolk Island, Lamington National Park and more.

I recently presented a very successful photographic tour to Africa (Namibia, Okavango Delta and Victoria Falls) with my Trekabout Photography Workshops And Tours business partner, Mark. We have another fully booked tour to Tanzania and the Serengeti slated for March 2015, with more African Photography Tours being planned for release.

To see more of Michael Snedic's images, read his articles, sign up for a photography newsletter or find out more about his photo workshops and tours, please visit www.michaelsnedic.com. To find out more information about Trekabout Photography Workshops And Tours, visit the website at www.trekaboutphotography.com. **DP**

Left

Australian sea lion juvenile

"This juvenile Australian sea lion was in a playful mood and was throwing around a sea sponge, heading straight towards me"

Working with wildlife

Michael Snedic's tips for great animal images

-  Get to know your camera. That way, when you come across some incredible wildlife behaviour, you won't be wasting time working out where certain settings are.
-  Spend time observing your species before you venture out. This means that you'll be more prepared for how the animal may react.
-  Use Aperture Priority when shooting wildlife. Choose the aperture and the camera's shutter speed will adjust itself.
-  Watch your background. There is nothing worse than having a tree or telegraph pole sticking up from behind an individual animal that you are photographing.
-  The most important point with wildlife photography – be patient. Often you have to go back repeatedly to get the shot.