

# Call of the wild

Patience, passion and persistence are key to this nature photographer's success

**M**ichael Snedic has been photobombed by a gorilla in the mountains of Rwanda. He's spent a week on the set of a David Attenborough documentary, working with the legend himself, and once spent two days shy of seven weeks hiding in the rainforest at O'Reilly's, south of Brisbane, to photograph the elusive Albert's lyrebird. It was the middle of winter.

Then there was the osprey in Cairns. It took three years, six flights, 50 boat trips, and nearly 6000km of driving to get the winning shot: an osprey flying towards the camera with a fish in its talons. That photograph (*inset*) made it on to the cover of *Australian Photography Magazine*.

Michael, 50, lists these achievements not to gloat, but to illustrate how hard he has worked to make a living as a nature and wildlife photographer.

"I get the word lucky, how lucky I am, and Dena, my wife, she just smiles. She knows," says Michael, who lives in Keperra, on Brisbane's northside.

"It has been many, many, many years, a lot of long hours and late nights on the computer, and being away, and low money, and through all of that it's just never giving up."

Michael grew up in Sydney. His father still tells the story of when Michael was a baby and it would be freezing outside, so he would be in the corner, frowning and miserable. His dad would rug him up and put him on his shoulders, and the minute they got outside, baby Michael would be beaming.

"It's hard to describe, I just feel happy and at peace. If I'm stressed, I go out in nature to relax with friends," he says.

"I've always been into nature, since I was a little boy. I was in what they used to call the Gould League of Bird Lovers, I watched David Attenborough documentaries ... I just loved it."

Before finding his true calling, Michael worked as a bird minder at Taronga Zoo and as Dick Smith's personal horticulturalist. He says Dick used to say, "If you've got a dream, work hard, believe in yourself, never give up and it will work", and Michael has always taken that with him, including deep into the jungle in Rwanda,

for his "number one, all time bucket list" African adventure.

"Just being there metres away, watching a silverback gorilla, who can knock you over with his finger, and he was three or four metres away eating bamboo shoots, completely calm. A gorilla mum with a baby on her back walked straight past me," he says, excitement still audible in his voice a month on from the trip.

It was here that he was photobombed by a gorilla, who can be seen in the background of a photograph, head back and mouth wide open, as though he is laughing.

Today, running tours to Africa is part of Michael's job. As well as writing and photographing stories for publications such as *Australian Geographic*, Michael operates tours (he's heading off to Antarctica in January), hosts workshops, speaks at photographic conferences and works for conservation organisations such as the Wilderness Society, the Wildlife Preservation Society and The Nature Conservancy.

"(The Nature Conservancy) is all about promoting the environment, getting rid of feral animals, educating people; it's brilliant," he says. "The whole idea is to get people interested, to get them out in nature and to get them involved. At this point in my career, it's wonderful to give back. That's not just a cliché, that's genuine."

Michael is the ambassador and judge of The Nature Conservancy Australia's Photo Competition, which is on the hunt for unique wildlife and cityscape photography from around Australia. Prizes totalling more than \$5000 include a workshop with Michael and two nights at O'Reilly's Rainforest Retreat, where Michael lived for five years in the 1990s.

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**THE NATURE CONSERVANCY AUSTRALIA'S PHOTO COMPETITION**, entries close Fri, Jul 24. See [natureaustralia.org.au](http://natureaustralia.org.au) or [michaelsnedic.com](http://michaelsnedic.com)

