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Eastern pygmy-possum

When asked to write a regular column on wildlife photography for *Wildlife Australia*, I spent ages deliberating on which photo to showcase as my first one. I thought it fitting to use my photo of an eastern pygmy-possum (*Cercartetus nanus*) sitting in a glorious red Queensland tree waratah – especially considering this issue's theme of 'colour'.

The pygmy-possum in this photo is part of a registered wildlife education business and quite used to people. A number of Queensland tree waratah flowers were put in his enclosure and as soon as it became dark, he was all over them. I had previously set up several diffused flash units to create an image with even, smooth lighting. This particular pygmy-possum spent much of the night turned away from me, side-on or with his head hidden behind the waratah. It wasn't until very late into the night, as I was starting to pack up, that he turned around and posed for me perfectly. I was able to compose my photo, adjust my aperture for the desired depth-of-field and focus on his eyes (very important when photographing wildlife).

The eastern pygmy-possum is quite a bland, brown colour (like many of our native mammals) so the rich, red colour of the Queensland tree waratah flower works as a nice contrast.

In the wild, these pygmy-possums live very high in the rainforest canopy and are extremely difficult to see, let alone get close enough with lighting to photograph them. Although captive breeding programs are no substitute for healthy, wild populations of native species in their natural environments, they do offer valuable opportunities for close-up study and photography. In capturing these delightful animals on camera, we hope we can raise public conservation awareness so that, with many of our native species in decline, images like these don't become sad reminders of extinctions.

Happy photography!

MICHAEL SNEDIC is a Brisbane-based nature photographer, writer, presenter of 'in-the-field' photography workshops and co-author of the recently released *Australian Journey – Wildlife*, published by New Holland Press (see p45 for review).

For more of Michael's photography, visit www.michaelsnedic.com
For information about Trekabout Photography workshops, visit www.trekaboutphotography.com

Thanks to Geckoes Wildlife Presentations for allowing this eastern pygmy-possum to be photographed: www.geckoeswildlife.com.au