



Lace monitor

Lace monitors (*Varanus varius*) have a reputation for being aggressive and unpredictable. When I was given an opportunity to photograph some adults in the wild, I was a tad apprehensive but also excited at the prospect. Over a week, I spent hours each day observing and photographing a number of adults basking through the cooler winter days in tropical north Queensland. On their own, the males were quite placid and would lie in the sun, absorbing some much-needed warmth. If another adult, especially a male, approached within their territory, they would often rise up and expand their muscles to show off their strength and might.

I was lying on my stomach and crawling ever-so-slowly towards this one particular male, hoping to take some wide-angled shots of his head and shoulders. Another male approached the territory and without warning, the male I was photographing lifted up his body and flexed his muscles in a show of aggression. I only had a split-second to take a couple of quick shots, using the continuous shutter setting on my digital SLR camera. Unfortunately, the monitor was so intent on posturing to the other male that he didn't realise I was still there. He suddenly leapt forward and landed on my head and shoulders! Fortunately, my friend was nearby and quickly distracted him and he ran off. I didn't know whether to be petrified or laugh – the experience was absolutely surreal.

It is important to observe your wildlife subjects before you photograph them and watch for behavioural patterns to emerge. Also, arrange your camera settings well before you start composing your shot. When photographing wildlife behaviour, patience is one of the key elements to achieving those special photos. Eventually, the animal will make that move you have been waiting for and that's when you grab the opportunity to take some shots. Happy photography!

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Be prepared and grab the moment before the subject grabs you.