

# Shoot wild animals on photo safari

**Travel** African experts help you take snappy wildlife pictures

KELLY MacNAMARA

**T**HERE'S a knack to photographing the Little Bee-eater. The picture you want is this: The bird is in mid-flight, its green shimmering wings flung wide and a just-caught bug clamped in its beak.

Precision timing, a steady hand and a little specialist knowledge are all essential. With the last of these, your pictures are transformed into the sort of images to grace a nature magazine, and without it you are doomed to an endless succession of empty branches.

If you're lucky, you just catch a claw disappearing out of shot.

Paul Goldstein has that specialist knowledge. An award-winning wildlife photographer who has coaxed, cajoled and demanded the best from amateur snappers for years.

I joined one of his safaris in Kenya's Masai Mara, hopeful of returning with pictures worthy of a frame.

Within minutes of arriving at our luxurious camp, we were bouncing along in one of Paul's

specially converted vehicles in pursuit of a cheetah and her two cubs.

We found the cheetah family bathed in honeyed afternoon light, with the mother looking wistfully into the distance. The scene was beautiful, but my companions had other ideas.

"They're hungry," said our guide Patrick, setting off a flash of excitement in Paul.

"She'll hunt!", he cried, "Go, go, go!" We swung away from the deceptively languid scene, adrenaline racing, our eyes scanning the countryside for prey.

In the distance, a juicy-looking Thomson's gazelle grazed near a thicket. Small and spry - an ideal feast for a peckish big cat - the gazelle munched on rough, scrappy grass while we raced to find a perfect view should the cheetah give chase.

She was on the move by the time we stopped, slinking through the brush to within feet of the gazelle. Then, she pounced. It was over in a second, the predator so close there was barely a chase. However, for a novice wildlife photographer, the thrill was intense.

Only afterwards did I realise I had caught the action on camera: The cheetah lunging from a swirl of dust, front paws stretched out to whip the gazelle's back legs from under it.

I was helped by the fact my camera was primed with the shooting action, with aperture and shutter speed set to Paul's specifications.

The Mara has life in mind-boggling abundance and often we found sightings of the area's smaller characters as enjoyable as the big predators.

We were not forced into a

rigid itinerary simply ticking off sightings and moving on, but we could stop for 20 minutes to watch a kingfisher or delight in the antics of a warthog family.

Olive, from a much-loved leopard dynasty, provided the most memorable experience of our trip, leaping into a tree only feet from our vehicle with her cubs to retrieve a kill.

Seeing a leopard at all is a privilege, but we could see the twitch of every whisker, the ripple of every muscle beneath the rich coat, her majestic head, intelligent eyes and really, really big teeth. It was breathtaking.

Huge crowds of wildebeest gathered for annual crossings of the Mara heading for the Serengeti and Tanzania, and we watched in wonder as animals fought to cross the river, unperturbed as crocodiles picked off the occasional snack.

Our wonder grew when some on the other side forgot themselves and crossed back over.

Wildebeest, a sensitive species, can take hours to build up the courage to cross, so took lunch, gazing at fish bone clouds drifting across the cornflower sky.

We left the delightful surroundings of our tents around 5am every day, before the sky betrayed even the first blush of morning. Often we were still out at sunset, chasing the dying light for a spot to take in the great bil-

lowing clouds as they bruised against a hot red sky. At these

times, photographs came second to soaking up the astonishing beauty of the dying Mara day with a cold beer. Returning to a hot shower and a drink around the campfire, we buzzed from the excitement of the day and waited sheepishly for Paul to appraise our shots.

“What is this?” he asked contemptuously of an unfortunately-framed lion. “You’ve cut its feet off. Delete!”

We wanted the right light, a good camera and, of course, action. Thanks to the eagle eyes of our guides, and Paul’s knowledge and unwavering enthusiasm, we had all in abundance.

## YOUR GUIDE

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## TRAVEL FACTS

KELLY MacNAMARA was a guest on an Exodus Photographic Safari, with award-winning photographer Paul Goldstein and local guides. Group sizes 4-12, min age 16. Nine-day package, from £2699, with six nights’ tented camp accommodation, return Kenya Airways flights from London, internal flights, and transport by open-sided four-wheel-drive vehicles in the Mara. Regional connecting flights from £32.50. Next departures are in June and September. Exodus reservations: 0845 863 9601 and [www.exodus.co.uk](http://www.exodus.co.uk).



**UP CLOSE AND ANIMAL:** Wildlife photo hunters observe a rhino family. Below, Paul Goldstein

