

# 10 WAYS TO SUCCEED AS A WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER

Hugely successful photographer David Yarrow reveals the business secrets behind his success

## 01 Pursuit of excellence

Be very tough on yourself and be constant in the commitment to the pursuit of excellence. I took probably four really strong images in 2015. If I honestly felt I had taken 100 [strong images], I'd be deluding myself and [decreasing] the value of [the very best] images.

I will always sacrifice comfort for content, sleep for content and occasionally my own safety for content. Why bother to do this at all, if you don't pursue it with single-minded focus? For someone else to want an image of a moment in time when they were not privy to that moment is a huge honour and it is for the photographer to respect that. Do not accept average or banal or you will go nowhere.

## 02 Show good fiscal husbandry and common sense

My experience is that, in the fine art market, images with serenity sell better than decisive action moments. For instance, imagine taking a picture of a Komodo dragon attacking a deer – this may have some stock value, but does anyone really want to put it on their wall? I would doubt it. Even if the stock image is a

big seller, the cost of flying to Jakarta then getting to Komodo is unlikely to be recouped by sales. So unless photography is your hobby or you are good enough to work for National Geographic, this is a poor destination choice, even if you are lucky enough to get a big image, which could take weeks. In other words, always [consider] which animals people can relate to and care about. All other things being equal, the more popular the animal, the more likely any image of that animal being of value. I don't know many people that can afford school fees from photographing bats, rats or seagulls.

## 03 Know your buyer

In sales, remember that we are now in a world of content overload. More pictures are taken in a week than in the whole history of film. Photography enfranchises everyone – even those with just a camera on their phone – look, for instance, at the Apple

*Below*

### Long march

Many of Yarrow's images take a fine art approach and he carefully researches the market whenever he is not away shooting

All images © David Yarrow







**GET CLOSE**  
David Yarrow's images are often characterised by his ability to get close to his subject matter, filling the frame and creating a sense of impact and drama.



iPhone adverts parading photographs from users. This has resulted in the price for stock pictures falling markedly. Very few people can make a career out of selling stock images of wildlife, which is unfortunate as there are many that deserve to.

The problem is simply that there is huge supply competing against static demand. If it is your intention to photograph stock, be very wary of going to a place where there are photographers next to you. How can you take something that they can't? Of course, talent and equipment ensure that it is not a level playing field, but think smart. Does anyone really need to see another picture of a river crossing during the East African migration?

If your goal is to build a portfolio for a book or a show, you can perhaps afford to occasionally go on assignment to the more established destinations, but again remember to try and be different and not accept generic results.

**04 Consider black and white**  
I shoot in colour, but only ever release [my images] in black and white. This is my personal decision and thank goodness most chose not to do this. Monochrome prints have a timelessness that can be both evocative and visceral. Black and white is also an abstraction of reality and since we live our lives in colour, some degree of abstraction allows for perception and a sense of art.

Andy Warhol once said: "my favourite colour is black and my other favourite colour is white."

## Meet the pro

Get to know more about Nikon ambassador David Yarrow



London-based photographer David Yarrow was named the Young Scottish Photographer of the Year at the age of just 20. Yarrow made his name photographing events such as the World Cup, snapping such iconic moments as Diego Maradona with the trophy. Subsequently, He has turned his attention to wildlife, developing a strong reputation as a world-class fine art photographer of the natural world. His style is marked by his love of getting close to his subjects. "My view is that you have to be close or there's no point. The great war photographer Robert Capa said, 'If the picture is not good enough, you are not close enough.' A 400mm flattens everything; you need proximity to get the soul. I generally use wide-angle lenses, including the 24mm f1.4 and the 35mm f1.4... I also really love the 58mm f1.4, my 'warrior' lens - it's very expensive, but very high performance, and with the D810 it's a great combination... If I do need the reach - which you do if you feel the animal, such as a polar bear, is a fatal threat - I tend to use the 200mm f2."

Most importantly, however, interior designers love black-and-white photographs - they fit into any room in the world. Colour images do not - they can be loud and too attention grabbing. But each to their own - this is a personal view.

**05 Invest in quality**  
It absolutely baffles me that some photographers will fly club class and stay in good hotels, travel long distances and show admirable patience and yet, when the moment comes, they are not using the very best equipment. Surely this is pure folly? If cash is tight and money needs to be saved, travel economy and have the very best Nikon gear.

My 58mm lens has made me several million dollars of sales, but it is the price of an upgrade on long haul from economy to club. Do not compromise on equipment if you want to be the best you can be - just take hits elsewhere.

**06 Be a salesman**  
In 2015, I have photographed for 55 days and spent a further 25 travelling to places for assignments... That leaves 80 per cent of the year without my cameras. In that time I am doing two things: research for future trips and selling.

I find the false pride some photographers take in not being salesmen quite astonishing. We are all salesmen in life, unless we just don't care. The president of America is a salesman and, at an art level, so too is Banksy. What gives photographers the right to hide behind

some vain, bohemian cloud of commercial indifference? I sold 4 million pounds of photographs in 2015, but none to Russian clients and none to the Middle East. So that's where I will be going in the gaps that appear in Q1 2016. The great thing about this market is that it is global. There is no money to be made in taking pictures of a badger in Somerset and then selling it to people in Taunton. As much as I love a good squirrel in Hyde Park, one has to have a global perspective on [both] content and selling.

**07 Have an understanding partner - or be single**  
Do not go away with your partner and compromise. To excel means being selfish with time and mental allocation. This is not a job to do after a nice big breakfast - forget breakfast; on the Equator, you have been up since 5am, so it's nearly time for lunch. At my lodge in Amboseli, Kenya, where I spend a great deal of time, I have not been seen at breakfast for years - it would be deeply embarrassing! Also, I do believe in getting in the zone and being extremely focused. This is work, not play. I can seem miserable on assignment; I am not, I am just thinking. Do not let anyone get in the way of your helicopter mind. In other words, be very selfish - it's a job not a holiday!

**08 Use the Internet - it's free**  
Before I go away I will spend hours exploring every aspect of where I am going - logistics, daylight hours, the work of others etc.  
Before I spend time in South Sudan, I did hours of research on the region and examined every picture online that had been taken there. I felt that many of the photographs I saw suffered from the camera being too low to offer any sense of scale - the topography around the banks of the Nile is very flat. That is why I took a ladder to South Sudan and *Mankind* became a million-pound picture.

**09 Be precise on timing**  
I try to have military precision in all that I do. On the Equator, 6.45am is very different to 7am - the light is at least three stops different, so don't be casual: 6.45am means 6.45am, not even 6.50am. If you have flown a long way, don't lose a sense of precision when you arrive.

**10 Take fewer pictures**  
On my last trip to Africa I took just 11 pictures. One of them will become a huge winner for me - *Gold*. Don't use the motor drive as a toy - use it when it's really necessary. Less is more and the world does not need pulp, it needs new material. **DP**

## Nikon School Master the D810

The Nikon School in London runs a course dedicated to David Yarrow's favourite camera, the D810

The Nikon School in London has two courses designed to help Nikon D810 users get the most from their camera - Getting Started with D810/D800/D800E Part 1 and Part 2, on 28 January 2016 and 25 February 2016. **Digital Photographer** users can get 10% off any course at the Nikon School using the code 'acddfhpny' before 31 March 2016.

**Opposite top-right Heaven can wait**  
Yarrow believes in being extremely precise with his timings, aiming to shoot when the quality of the light is at its absolute peak

**Opposite-left The puzzle**  
Images in Yarrow's portfolio are often graphic in approach and make skilled use of a black-and-white presentation

**Opposite bottom-right The circle of life**  
Yarrow believes in using the very best Nikon equipment possible, enabling him to achieve the maximum quality

**Above Gold**  
Over the course of a year, Yarrow takes relatively few images. His aim is to achieve quality rather than quantity