

# KENYA 2023



## Photo Safari Tips

**WILDSTOCK™**  
*Photography*

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Thank you for joining us on our Kenya Photo Safari. My wife and I have led photography workshops for over 15 years in exciting locations including the Amazon, the Andes, the Galapagos Islands and the lush rainforests of Costa Rica. For our new destination Kenya, rest assured that we have done a lot of research and have selected the most experienced tour providers. Holbrook Travel has nearly 48 years of experience leading tours around the world while Nature Expeditions has close to 30 years of experience leading photographic safaris across Africa. We are very grateful to have two of the best companies organizing our trip.



Our first international venture was in the year 2000 when we explored the country of Costa Rica. It wasn't until 2006 that we started our first commercial operation in the country. Since then, we have added many photo destinations including the National Parks of the United States, Panama, Jamaica, Mexico, and Ecuador. We strive to provide you with not only good photo opportunities but also unforgettable experiences to learn about the cultural and economic importance of our destinations.

I started my photography career at age sixteen shooting with a Minolta Maxxum 7000- the world's first autofocus camera. While in college seeking a degree in biology, I became involved with various scientific publications which opened my eyes to the natural world. Later on, I became a commercial photographer working for ad agencies and newspapers, but always drifted back to my true passion...nature photography. This led to the creation of Wildstock Photography, a company dedicated to wildlife and nature photography. But it didn't end there. In order to fully understand life around the world, one must learn about the people, their history, food, and only then we could find the real meaning of life.

A trip to Kenya is one that teaches you more about the world we live in and to appreciate people and nature. We look forward to meet new friends as well as share with many of our longtime friends on this trip.

Thank so so much,





## What gear to bring?

This is perhaps the most common question asked by our workshop participants regardless of the destination. My answer tends to be the same with some exceptions. The best gear to bring is what you already have! Too many people get over complicated by purchasing new cameras or lenses just before their trip, leaving little time to learn the functionality of their new gear. This ends in frustration and lots of throw away shots.

For sure a DSLR or mirrorless camera are the way to go for any wildlife photography, but even a compact digital camera with a built in super zoom is not a bad idea for an African safari. These all-inclusive systems are dust proof and occupy little space. For example the Sony DSC-RX10, offers a 24-600mm f2.4-4 shooting at 24 fps on a 20.1 MP sensor and 4K video- not bad for something that fits in your hands.

But for the pro's, there's nothing like a prime lens such as the 500mm f4. While undoubtedly they offer the best quality and performance, these lenses are extremely cumbersome at times, especially when shooting from a cramped vehicle. To our advantage, there will be only four participants per vehicle, and the vehicles are very spacious. Wildlife Expeditions graciously provided me some images of the vehicles we will be using. Another disadvantage of the prime lens is the minimum focusing distance which is usually 10 feet or more. In comparison, a Nikon 200-500mm f5.6 focuses at 7.2 feet and the Sigma 150-600mm at about 8.3 feet. For those of you with large prime



lenses, I will recommend a second body with a zoom lens such as a 70-200mm or even a 100-400mm. This will allow you to switch bodies for closer shots without removing lenses. We will be traveling through dusty and windy terrain, therefore changing lenses while on the road is not recommended.

Since wildlife are not the only subjects we'll be shooting, I would recommend a moderate wide angle zoom that covers at least 18mm on the widest for FX cameras or 10mm for DX format cameras for landscapes. There will be some "street photography" which includes people, foods, etc. Having a well rounded walk-around lens such as an 18-105mm will be an ideal choice. Alternatively, a small mirrorless camera could be used for this type of photography as it's easy to carry and is less conspicuous.

While tripods are not recommended for the safari, there are other opportunities where a tripod may be useful in which case I recommend a lightweight traveling tripod. One instance you may want to use a tripod is if shooting videos around the lodges or astrophotography at night. Our vehicles are equipped with

Use wide aperture for softer backgrounds



beanbags for lens support.

It goes without saying that you will need plenty of memory cards and a way to back them up. I prefer to use smaller size cards in the 64GB range over a 512Gb card in case of failure. Losing a 512Gb full of images will be more painful than losing only a 64GB. Traveling with laptop or tablet that allows you to backup images to an external USB drive is highly recommended.

I will suggest the use of camera or lens straps when moving around the vehicle. I have seen too many cameras falling to their death because the user failed to secure them to their body. In many occasions you will be holding your big rig through a window or rooftop while we move to reposition the vehicle so it's very important to keep your equipment tied up somehow. Also don't forget to bring enough sensor cleaners and camera cleaning gear, including dust brush and anti-static towels. If you have any questions about gear, feel free to contact me at:

[info@wildstockphotos.com](mailto:info@wildstockphotos.com)

## 1. Know Your Gear

Can't stress this enough. The African savanna is not the place to learn how your camera works. Understanding every feature and its limitations will definitely make a difference for your photography. Having plenty of charged batteries and cards available before you climb on the vehicle is crucial to an enjoyable safari. But if everything fails, you may simply take it all in by simply watching, listening and smelling the vast savanna. These are memories worth taking with you either way on film or in your head forever.

## 2. Shoot In RAW

Shooting in Raw will allow you more flexibility when editing your pictures later. The 12 or 14-bit format provides you with the maximum dynamic range the sensor can provide.

This means you will get richer colors with smoother gradients and less artifacts from compression. Now if you want to share your images with friends and family abroad, you may consider shooting RAW+JPG. Keep in mind this will use more space on your cards.

## 3. Move Locations

When in the vehicle, make sure to share the space with others, including allowing others to take your spot during a shoot while you take theirs. Doing this will provide you and your van mates with different shooting angles and composition. Shooting through a window versus shooting through the rooftop can make for two completely different images. Sharing is caring and we are all here to have a great time while shooting some great images. Our drivers and guides are highly trained on positioning the vehicles for the best shooting angles and will do their best to make it happen.

## 4. Be Patient

As we travel the long roads through Kenya there will be times with no signs of life other than plants and your fellow photographers. Don't panic! Things happen when you least expect them. The guide may see a pride of lions moving in the distance, so he will order the drivers to position the vehicles for best viewing. In time the lions will come within reach of your lens. Once close, you will wait even longer until a great action shot arises, such as cubs interacting or a lioness chasing prey. We must wait.



## 5. Watch Your Settings

At times we focus so much on our picture taking that we miss the right settings. Stopping the lens too much may reveal some unwanted details in the background or shooting at too slow of a shutter speed can render blurry images. Be on top of the exposure, know your limitations and when to change settings. Most subjects are close to middletone on fairly even colored backgrounds therefore it is really easy



**Set your shutter speed to at least 1/1000 sec. to freeze most action shots. If light permits, use even faster shutter speeds without going to high on the ISO.**

mode to expose them using a semi-automated exposure modes such as aperture priority. In situations with rapidly changing light conditions, I prefer to shoot in manual mode with Auto ISO. Using this mode I can select the desired shutter speed and aperture and the camera will only change the ISO to compensate for the shifting light conditions. In this mode you can still override the exposure by dialing exposure compensation as needed. The change will be applied to the ISO only, without affecting the selected aperture or shutter speed.

For metering mode, I prefer to use Matrix/Evaluative metering over center-weighted with exposure values in 1/3 stop increments. Don't forget that if in doubt you can always take a quick peek at your histograms. With the new mirrorless with dynamic histograms, it's even easier to nail the exposure on the fly. Simply look through your viewfinder and use the histogram on the EVF to get the right exposure.

## 6.Keep It Fast!

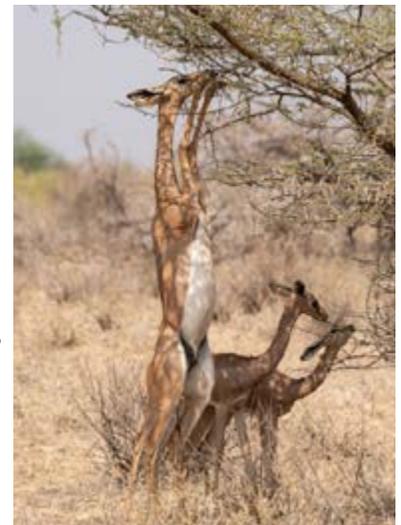
Your camera should be in AF-C or continuous autofocus when shooting wildlife. You should also program the camera to use the AF-ON button or "back focus" to void the dual functionality of the shutter button. With AF-ON, the shutter button's only function is to take the picture, while the AF-ON button ( AE-L/AF-L) on the back of the camera is used to activate and maintain focus. With this option, you can easily stop focusing by releasing the button then recompose and focus by pressing the button again. You are in full control of the start-stop off the AF motors.

Your camera's DRIVE MODE should be in the highest frames-per-second (fps) possible. Most cameras nowadays

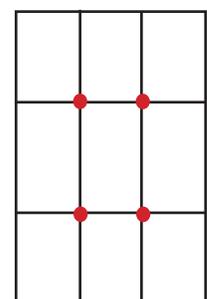
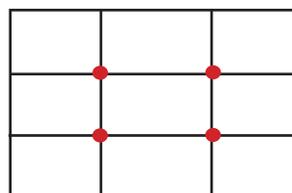
are capable of shooting at least 5 fps, while some more advanced models may shoot up to 30 fps. Keeping it fast will let you capture all the action. When combined with the right shutter speed, you can really capture some action stopping images.

## 7.Go Vertical

I have met too many photographers that rarely shoot a vertical image. For whatever reason they fail to create vertically strong compositions even when the subject dictates that choice. Laziness? Not sure. Many ignore the redundant set of controls on their camera's grip that help with vertical shooting. Vertical shots work great for tall subjects like giraffes or long-tailed birds like whydahs.



Turn on the gridlines in your viewfinder to help you compose better using the rule-of-thirds of composition. These lines are positioned to create the most impact when the subject falls on the intersecting lines.



Shoot wider when in doubt and crop later. Cropping too tight in-camera may prevent the use of the image on a particular size format. Use guiding lines when possible to lead your viewer to the main subject.

## 8. Narrow Vs. Wide

We tend to get fixated on close-up portraits of wildlife so we can brag about how close we were. But in reality that's far from the truth. Some of the most moving and iconic wildlife images are done using a wide-angle macro focusing only inches away from the subject. These images are striking because they amplify the subject while showing its habitat. In fact, we call them environmental portraits.

The point is, you should do both; capture a wide environmental shot and a closer shot to show the details of your subject. This can be easily accomplished with the use of two camera bodies.

## 9. Keep it Quiet!

You don't want to be the one that ruins it for everybody else. As excited as one may get, we should refrain from talking too loud, or shutting doors in a way that makes a giraffe run out of sight. Remember being quiet is part of being a successful wildlife photographer. Good things happen to those that wait and do so quietly. If in doubt, ask the lions.

## 10. Always be Ready

It only takes a split second to lose a great shot, so it pays to be alert and ready to act. That said, you don't need to have your eyes glued to the windows. But if you decide to doze off, make sure your camera is on with the power saving activated, so you can jump back to action when needed. Keep your gear close to you and have an extra battery and memory card in your pocket so you don't have to search through your camera bag in the heat of the moment. Action shots are well prized and a sitting cheetah image is no match to one chasing prey.

