

YOUR GUIDE TO CULTURE & ENTERTAINMENT

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# THE REVIEW

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## Days of being wild

Photo: Jonathan Wong





# Close calls

Nature photographer David Yarrow talks to Kylie Knott about Africa, animals and Old Spice

Photo: Edmund So

David Yarrow is a fan of Old Spice, the men's grooming brand that reached the peak of its popularity in the 1980s. But he doesn't splash its products on his face or roll them under his armpits; he applies them to his camera.

"My secret's out," the 47-year-old Scotsman says with a laugh. "Yes, I douse my camera in Old Spice to entice animals... I use a remote technique to take pictures so I'm away from the camera, but I need a scent to attract the animals and this varies depending on the species.

"With elephants you don't need anything because you can predict where they will be within 100 metres. With lions you shouldn't be closer than 60 metres - if you trip, you're in trouble - and I don't use meat to lure them but an Old Spice aftershave. My guide knew lions were attracted to that smell as [ethnic Kenyans] the Masai and colonialists have worn it for years, so I slather it onto the camera. With rhinos we use their own s\*\*\* - they're attracted to their own defecation."

These tricks of the trade have made the self-taught snapper one of the most respected wildlife photographers in the world. His work has taken him from the

parched plains of Africa to the frozen whiteness of the Antarctic, providing him with memorable encounters with tigers, lions, elephants, rhinos and monkeys. And with a fair share of occupational hazards, some encounters have been more memorable than others.

Pointing to a huge image of a tiger in India's Ranthambore National Park, Yarrow says: "This handsome beast killed two villagers in Rajasthan." In Alaska he came face to face with a fully grown brown bear, and in Cape Town, South Africa, he spent 30 hours on water to capture the moment a great white shark breached the water to catch a seal. "There have been some scary moments but as the great war photographer Robert Capa said, 'If a picture isn't good enough, you're not close enough'. It's very true."

A look at just how close Yarrow got was beautifully presented at "Encounter", an exhibition at The Space gallery in Central last month that also showcased his book of the same name.

The giant black-and-white images perfectly capture the detail of the beasts in the wild, his love of stark scenery, and his desire to look deep into the eyes of his subject. "This has a great back story," he says

of an image of a lioness looking like a giant with a tree dwarfed in the background. "She was in Amboseli National Park in Kenya and came straight towards the camera that had been planted remotely. Afterwards she picked up the camera and took it into the bush. Luckily I was able to retrieve it... I remember being emotionally exhausted that day and it was only 7am."

One picture of a cheetah on top of a sand dune in Namibia has an ethereal quality, with a fierce wind giving the impression the animal is floating.

Humans get a brief look in: there's an image of a naked woman face-to-face with a cheetah ("it's about sensuality rather than

sexuality"); an Ormo warrior of Ethiopia wading through a dirty river with a gun slung across his shoulders; and an Ethiopian boy of the Suri tribe all dressed and decorated - complete with flowers in his mouth - free from influences from the outside world.

The images caught the eye of Prince William who was a guest at London's Saatchi Gallery last month where Yarrow's works were on show. With a shared love and respect for Africa and the environment, Yarrow was soon involved with Tusk, a charity that supports wildlife, communities and education in Africa. The prince is a patron of the NGO.

"It was quite ironic to walk down [Hollywood Road where] my exhibition is on and see shops selling items made of carved ivory... For me, the timing of this project - a time when elephants and rhino numbers are being decimated - could not be better."

Ten per cent of print and book sales will go to Tusk.

Reflecting on his career, Yarrow recalls a major turning point as a 20-year-old with *The Times*, he was sent to cover the 1986 World Cup final in Mexico City where he took a picture of Argentinian football star

Diego Maradona with the victory cup held aloft. The image is still widely published today.

Since then, his path has focused on photography and ways to stand out from the crowd. Examples of his work are featured in *Encounter*, his second book, which comprises 90 black-and-white images mostly shot in Africa (he released his first book, *Nowhere*, in 2007).

Yarrow says trying to make a living from book sales is not realistic. "The prints are selling well, but it's difficult to make money from books unless you write about sex or bondage or wizards... or pasta."

Finally, Yarrow gets a shot of his own medicine: he sits in front of a Kenyan bull elephant for his own photo-call. The image, he says, is one of his favourites. "It captures the joy of working in Africa in flat light and also testifies to the magnificence of African wildlife."

It also shows what Yarrow does best: getting up close and personal with some of the world's most amazing animals.

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For inquiries about David Yarrow's book, *Encounter*, and images, contact *The Cat Street Gallery* at [info@thecatstreetgallery.com](mailto:info@thecatstreetgallery.com)



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