



Sweet silhouettes

By Lou Coetzer

THE STORY

I grew up with Africa's amazing sunrises and sunsets, but somewhere along the way I stopped really looking at them. Perhaps I was just too focused on taking advantage of the golden light that each provided me with. That was until one winter evening on the Chobe River in Botswana a few years ago. As we were cruising back to our lodge after a dramatic afternoon of photography I suddenly realised that every other boat had stopped to point their cameras at something. It soon dawned on me that the subject of all their images was a magnificent sunset. Not far downriver from them, I found a herd of elephants drinking with the sun behind them. Surely it was the perfect scene to create some photographic magic.

THE LESSON

It's not an easy task to capture the emotion of the sun setting over a beautiful African horizon. One great way is to create a silhouette, and the elephants I encountered would be the ideal subject. As with most situations in African wildlife photography, patience and timing are vital ingredients in taking a great image. I concentrated on one of the cows, hoping that she would soon turn towards her calf and in the process show me her profile.

Effective silhouettes are far easier to accomplish against a clean horizon line, particularly if the subject is much higher than the photographer. To accentuate this ideal angle I got down as low as possible in the customised photographic chair from which I was shooting. Eventually both the cow and the calf turned and started to walk towards each other - I had the silhouette I had been hoping for.

All modern cameras are programmed to render a bit of a silhouette by under exposing the photograph in a backlit scene like this, but I suggest that photographers further underexpose the image by setting the EV value of their cameras further to the minus side. □

* See more of Lou's photography at www.coetzermaturephotography.com

This image was shot with a NIKON D800, with a NIKON 70-200mm F2.8 VR lens at 200mm; ISO 640; F6.3; 1/3200 sec; EV -1.0



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