



PHOTO MASTERCLASS PART FOUR

FROM DUSK TO DAWN

in association with
TAMRON®



A sunrise or sunset can transform an ordinary setting or subject into something really magical, but how do you take advantage of this beautiful light? We show you how to capture the gorgeous colours and get the perfect silhouette to make the most of that special moment.

WITH WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER MARK CARWARDINE

PHOTOGRAPHERS ARE ALWAYS enthusing about the strikingly beautiful light at the beginning and end of the day. Shooting at dusk or dawn has rich rewards, from rich colours to eye-catching silhouettes, and it's also when many animals are at their most active.

Another advantage of shooting at this time of day is that it's possible to take great wildlife pictures in the most unlikely places. A garden pond, concrete sea-front or roadside tree may not justify a second glance in daylight, but as the sun is rising or setting they often provide spectacular photo opportunities. The reason is simple: dusk and dawn photography is more time-dependent than place-dependent. Everywhere has potential if you are there at the right time of day, so there's always a chance to transform

otherwise ordinary pictures into really magical ones.

If you don't like the idea of being up and about at least an hour before dawn, try shooting at dusk. You'll get only half as many photographic opportunities as the early risers, but it's difficult to tell the difference in the final pictures. Either way, it can be hard work. When the sun is rising or falling, the atmosphere may be soft and calm, but colours often change rapidly and dramatically. A picture taken one minute can look totally different to another taken just a minute or two later, even when the subject hasn't moved, so you need to work quickly and efficiently.

This month, we'll be finding out what makes one silhouette better than another and how to take advantage of the magnificent light at these special times of day.

▲ Richard du Toit is passionate about photographing African mammals, birds and landscapes, and often shows them framed by Africa's spectacular sunrises and sunsets. Here, three giraffes create unmistakable silhouettes against a glowing sky.



MEET THE EXPERT...

Every issue, our world-famous photographers share their knowledge and skills.

RICHARD DU TOIT SOUTH AFRICA

Award-winning photographer Richard du Toit specialises in African wildlife. He turned professional in 1995 and his work is published worldwide.



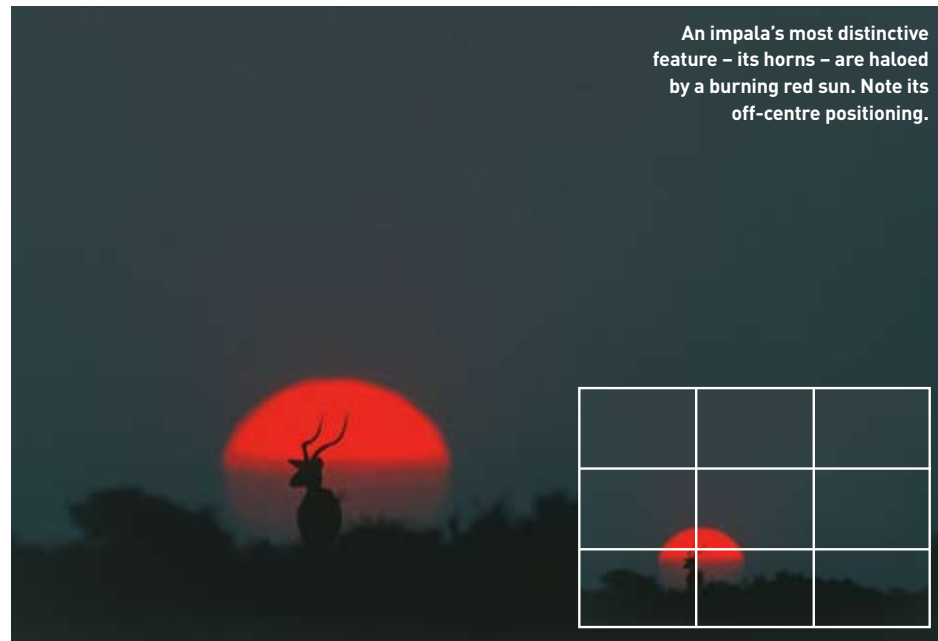
Richard du Toit is well known for his dramatic dawn and dusk images of wildlife in southern and eastern Africa. "I've spent so much time looking into the sun," he jokes, "I often wonder why I haven't gone blind." In a typical year, he spends about six months in the field, working from an hour or two before dawn until well after sunset. He takes a short break in the middle of the day, when the sun is at its highest and harshest.

"Many people stop taking pictures when the sun has dropped below the horizon," he says, "but that's often the best time. The colour of the sky can be gorgeous when the sun is out of sight, and I love the special half-light as it continues to sink."

Richard is an opportunistic photographer and doesn't plan too many images in advance. "I'm continually astounded by nature," he says. "I would rather be pleasantly surprised by great picture opportunities than frustrated simply because the animals aren't doing what I had planned. I do try to predict minute-by-minute, of course, and then get into the best possible position. But that's merely making the most of opportunities at the time."

Many photographers use computers to boost the natural colours of dawn and dusk, but Richard prefers to keep things natural. "I don't even put filters on my lenses," he laughs, "perhaps because I'm a naturalist first and a photographer second. I prefer to record nature exactly as I see it."

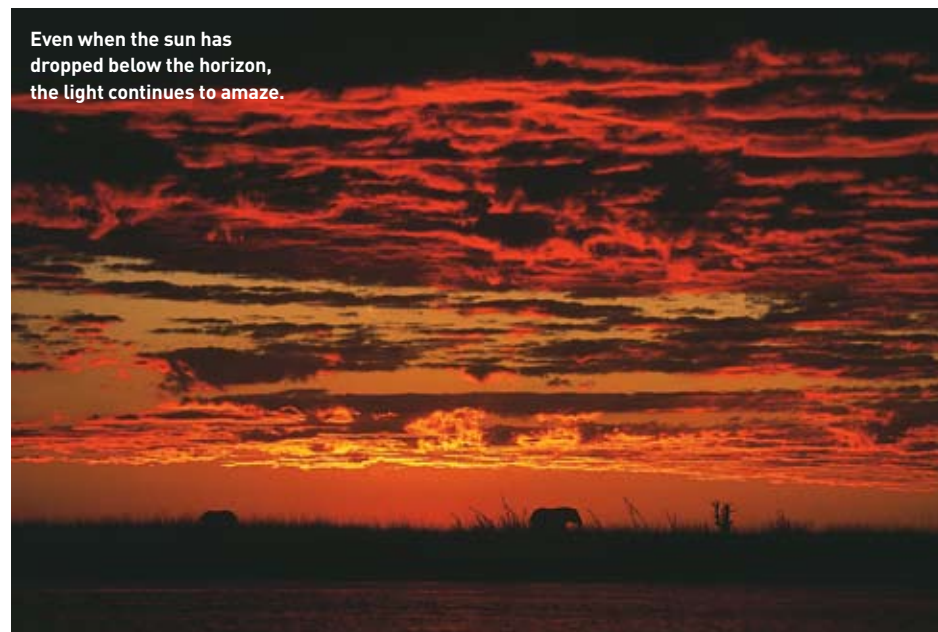
Richard du Toit's top dusk-till-dawn photography tips



An impala's most distinctive feature – its horns – are haloed by a burning red sun. Note its off-centre positioning.

1 Avoid centre-frame

Imagine drawing two horizontal and two vertical lines across the frame to produce four points where the lines cross. Then try positioning your main subject on one of those points instead of right in the centre of the frame. It makes the picture far more compelling – especially when photographing a silhouette against a sunrise or sunset.



Even when the sun has dropped below the horizon, the light continues to amaze.

2 Extend the day

Start shooting before everyone else and continue shooting after they have packed up and gone home. When the sun is just below the horizon, only the light from the glowing sky overhead illuminates the scene, so shooting at this time calls for long exposures (which require a tripod and cable release). But the light can be superb.

YOUR STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE...

Mark Carwardine shows you how to apply the theory to get the perfect picture.

1 MAKE IT RECOGNISABLE



- » **Make sure your subject** has distinctive, well-defined contours. If you are photographing an animal silhouetted against the rising or setting sun, this simple technique will ensure your picture stands out from the crowd.
- » **Choose an animal** with a familiar shape – anything with horns, antlers, protruding teeth, long ears or peculiar feathers is ideal.
- » **Get the best angle.** Tusks make this walrus recognisable because it was caught at the right angle, but if it was looking away from the camera, it would be a featureless blob.

2 WATCH THE BACKGROUND



- » **Produce a clear** and striking silhouette by keeping the background clean and free of distractions. The trick is checking that there is nothing else behind your main subject to make sure you avoid merging one silhouette with another – it's too confusing and rarely works. You may have to crouch down low to clear the horizon, but it's worth getting your knees dirty.
- » **Consider shooting against** a plain sky. These starlings' distinctive shapes and the pattern of the flock would have been invisible if they had been shot against trees, hills or buildings.

3 LOOK TO THE SKY



- » **Include the sun** in the picture if it's close to the horizon. Pick your exposure for a clear portion of the sky next to the sun, rather than the sun itself, so that your subject forms a perfect silhouette while the sky retains its deep colour. Experiment with different exposures – lightening or darkening a sunrise or sunset can have a big impact on the mood of the picture.
- » **Use a lens hood** when shooting towards the sun to avoid flare.
- » **Never look directly** at the sun, especially through a long lens, or you could damage your eyes.

4 INCLUDE THE ENVIRONMENT



- » **Don't always** shoot tight silhouettes. Make the most of the light by including more in the picture. Consider pulling back with a wider lens and showing the entire environment if it's interesting. There needs to be enough light (and your exposure should be sufficiently long) to show a reasonable amount of detail in the animal's surroundings. Remember not to place your main subject dead centre.
- » **Add a new** dimension to the picture by pulling back and shooting into the sun to accentuate the animals' breath.



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ESSENTIAL KIT... BEANBAG

Camera-shake is the bane of photographers working in reduced light at the beginning or end of the day. A brick-sized beanbag is one solution. Fill it up with beans, rice or even sand, and use it to rest your camera on the sides of safari vehicles, fenceposts or rocks.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- » A Velcro flap so that you can travel with it empty and then fill it when you arrive on location with whatever material is to hand.
- » A reasonable size for using a long lens. When full, it should weigh about as much as a couple of bags of sugar.
- » Flexibility – it should be full enough to provide support, but not so full that it can't be moulded into shape.

CHEAPER ALTERNATIVES:

- » Make a beanbag out of old jeans or any other tough material – but don't forget the Velcro flap.

DOS & DON'TS

- » DO work quickly and take lots of pictures (the light intensity and quality changes very quickly when the sun is close to the horizon).
- » DO get up early and be in position before the sun rises above the horizon.
- » DON'T pack up and go home as soon as the sun disappears below the horizon.
- » DON'T look directly into the sun (especially through a long lens) or you could damage your eyes.

In association with TAMRON



Tamron AF200-500mm Ultra Telephoto Zoom Lightweight and compact, this lens enables you get as close as 2.5m from your main subject at any focal length. An ultra telephoto zoom for professional results.

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MASTERCLASS CHALLENGE UK...



June offers stunning sunsets and exciting animal activity. Photographer **Mark Hamblin** reveals how to photograph accessible wildlife and sets our challenge.

Common seals

Common seals come ashore in June to pup. Blakeney Point in Norfolk and much of Scotland's west coast are prime locations. At other times, look out for adults hauled out on rocks at low tide. Approach slowly with the wind in your face. At sunrise or sunset, get down low and shoot towards the sun to silhouette the seal and create a dramatic picture.



Fallow deer

Deer give birth in spring, so now is a great time to visit deer parks, such as Richmond Park, London, or Bradgate Park, Leicester, to photograph fallow and red deer with fawns. Go back in October to capture the rut. In summer, roe can be photographed feeding in meadows close to woods at dawn. Use your car as a mobile hide and a beanbag to support your camera.



Puffins

June is a great month to photograph puffins at their clifftop breeding grounds. If possible, visit early or late in the day when the low-angled light can be used to create atmospheric rim-lighting and give the picture a special orange glow. For a more pictorial effect, select a slow shutter speed (1/30 sec) to blur the wings while keeping the head in sharp focus.



Badgers

Photographing at night or in low-light situations often means you need a flash. Species such as badgers will tolerate flash, but you should avoid undue disturbance. First, get the animals accustomed to your presence, then introduce them to light by switching a torch on and off. To improve flash-lit pictures, use an off-camera flash or, better still, twin flashguns.



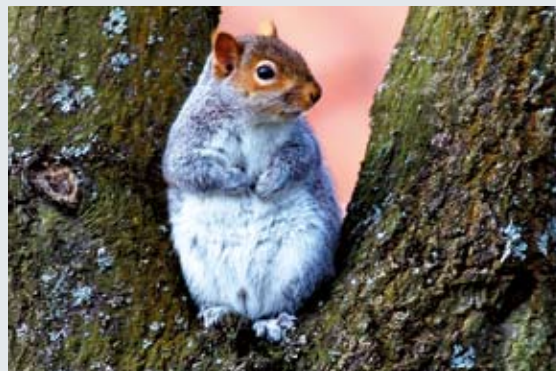
MASTERCLASS READER PHOTO OF THE MONTH

Now it's your turn. Use all our experts' hints and tips to photograph British seals, deer, puffins or badgers at dusk or dawn. Upload them on to our website and they could be published in *BBC Wildlife* or on our website.

HOW TO ENTER

Log on to www.bbcwildlifemagazine.com and click on Photo Masterclass, then follow the instructions to upload your images by 7 June.

RULES 1) The competition is open only to amateur photographers. 2) Up to two entries only per category. 3) Entry of a picture constitutes a grant to BBC Worldwide to publish it in all media. 4) Entries will be judged by *BBC Wildlife*. 5) The winning image will be published in the August issue. 6) No correspondence will be entered into and winners will not be notified. 7) Entries will not be accepted by post or email.



'MAMMAL PORTRAITS' WINNER: MARK PIKE

The entries in this month's competition were of a very high standard. We chose Mark's picture of a grey squirrel for its original composition, use of light and colour and its fine detail. Visit our website (see left) to enjoy the other fantastic mammal images that nearly made the top slot.