

BBC

Wildlife

PHOTOGRAPHY MASTERCLASS

with Mark Carwardine

#3 Interview with Sergey Gorshkov about his prize-winning photograph of a Siberian tiger

Sergey's equipment

The cameras in Sergey's camera traps were Nikon Z7s. These are mirrorless and therefore much quieter than DSLRs (which have noisy mirrors that clank up and down every time a picture is taken). Sergey also turned off the shutter sound so that the cameras shot silently. The silence had two key advantages: it was less likely to frighten the animals (or make them look directly at the camera) and it was less likely to inspire a close inspection (the noise of a regular DSLR can encourage big cats and bears to investigate the source of the noise more closely and, potentially, cause damage with their paws and teeth).

The cameras were installed in specially-made, very tough boxes (adapted Pelican cases) for protection against the elements (and wildlife) and they were bolted firmly to trees using metal brackets. The sensor system used to trigger the cameras – when the animals broke an infrared beam – was the American Cognisys camera trapping system
www.cognisys-inc.com

Sergey's great quote: "I can't call myself a professional; I still use the trial-and-error method of wildlife photography".

Camera settings

After much experimentation with exposure and focusing, Sergey settled upon these (successful!) settings:

- Manual focus (so that the focus doesn't 'float away' during shooting, for example when leaves fall in front of the lens).
- Manual exposure settings.

- ISO on Auto (so it varied from picture to picture) but set to a maximum of 3200. At the beginning and end of the day, when the animals were more active, the cameras obviously picked higher ISOs – but Sergey's philosophy was that it was better to have a little noise and a sharp image than no noise and a blurry image.
- Shutter speed 1/200 - 1/500 sec; aperture f5.6 - f6.3.



Born in a remote Siberian village in 1966, Sergey discovered photography in his 30s. He sold his business and took it up full time, focusing on the rich wildlife of Russia's wilderness. He is the founding member of the Russian Union of Wildlife Photographers and has won many awards for his work. He has published several fabulous books of his photography, including: 'Kamchatka – the Vanishing World'; 'Odyssey through Kamchatka'; and



Sergey's prize-winning photograph was taken with a Nikon Z7 camera and 50mm f1.8 lens (ISO 250, 1/200 sec at f6.3).

'Arctic Pearl – Wrangel Island'. You can see more of his images on Instagram ([sergey_gorshkov_photographer](https://www.instagram.com/sergey_gorshkov_photographer)) and Facebook (Sergey Gorshkov – Photographer).

Land of the Leopard National Park

A 2,799 sq km national park in Primorsky Krai, in the Russian Far East, established in 2012 to protect the Amur leopard, the world's rarest big cat. It is home to 75% of the world's last surviving wild Amur leopard population (there were just 30 Amur leopards 10 years ago, but there are now believed to be more than 90). It is also home to about 30 Siberian tigers (out of a total surviving population of 500-600). The chances of seeing a wild leopard or tiger are very slim but the park is also home to everything from Himalayan black bears and Eurasian lynx to Amur badgers and raccoon dogs.

Much of the park is open to visitors (there is a 'protected' zone that requires a special access permit) and there are efforts to prepare ecotourist trails and predator hides (where you can stay overnight). Most tours begin in Vladivostok, about 130km (three hours by bus) away from the village of Barabash, the gateway to the park (where there is accommodation).



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