

AI IS HAPPENING ALREADY!

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Better Photography



WONDERFUL
NATURE

Amazing portraits by
Pedro Jarque Krebs

Simon Harsent's the Locals • John Barclay's Opposite View
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After winning so many awards in our competitions, Better Photography thought it was high time to ask nature photographer Pedro Jarque Krebs exactly how he does it!

Pedro Jarque Krebs has made a name for himself with a striking approach to wildlife photography. In nature circles, he may not have received quite the acclamation he deserves because some of his photographs include too much post-production or his subjects were photographed in captivity. This is their loss and one of the reasons our *Better Photography* competition encourages all genres of photography without such restrictions.

Pedro's work has been seen regularly in our winners' circles with his distinctive wildlife portraits: beautiful light, black background and, most importantly, a nuance of pose or expression that takes his work into the extraordinary.

Insight

"I learnt to develop my negatives at the age of 15 and animals were already my passion. At that time I photographed mainly frogs and tadpoles. Then I became more interested in photographing people in a studio for a while, only to return to animal photography again.

"My university education is in philosophy, so my interest in animals is not only from an aesthetic point of view, but also philosophical.

"I take my time to observe the gestures of animals with a double interest. Each species has its own time and I could say that it is proportional to the complexity of the apparent degree of consciousness of each species, always of course



NATURE

— WITH A TWIST



from our human perspective. To put it graphically, a gorilla, for example, takes much more time to study than a crocodile, in my experience. Animals with a more developed degree of awareness interact with the photographer in a more evident way.

"But in any case, the gestures and postures of the animals depend to a great extent on the time you give them and above all on the patience of the photographer. In animal



photography, it is necessary to have almost infinite patience and a very good tolerance to frustration, because animals will not do what you want them to do, nor can you tell them how to pose. You have to wait with your camera and be very attentive, sometimes for a long time without any guarantee.

"There's a little luck factor too. So it's best to take photographs as often as possible to give 'luck' a better chance to show up. I have spent many hours in front of an animal without results. And on other occasions, I have immediately obtained something that exceeded my expectations."

Approach

Pedro's animal portraiture is distinctive, something that evolved from an early desire he had to work with animals in a photographic studio.

"The initial idea was simple: put the animal in the studio, with a dark/black background and work with studio lights, as one does with portraits of people. At that time, digital equipment did not exist so the logistics for carrying out this idea were extremely complicated, especially in the case of wild, dangerous or large animals. For example, getting an elephant or a lion into a photo studio was practically impossible, at least for me.

"So initially I was limited to working with small animals such as amphibians or reptiles. For the other animals, I had to park the project, but when digital technology came along, it opened up a new window of possibilities for realising my idea."





"I began to experiment with making animal portraits, either in captivity or in semi-freedom and darkening the background in post-production to get the result I wanted."

There are three approaches Pedro can take. "The first may be to have the animal located in front of a cave or against a naturally dark background, but this is not very common. The second method is to use an artificial light source, such as one or several flashes in a bank and use the camera's exposure settings to achieve the dark background. The third method is to darken the background or 'burn' it in post-production.

"When I started editing the photo to darken the backgrounds, I discovered that I liked the result much better, because when you are not in a real photo studio, the animal behaves naturally, without fear and without stress. And here again an important ethical consideration is consolidated: that of not disturbing or upsetting the animal. I began to get more interesting poses and interactions between the same animals that would be unthinkable in a studio."

Pedro explains that there are many situations where a black background could conceivably be natural, so he is quite comfortable making the changes to his files. "In this sense, I believe that my photography is creative more than documentary, but without altering the essence of the subject. The technique merely highlights the essence of the animal as it is presented to me, with its own complete freedom of movement.

"Photos with animals in a real studio usually show a frightened subject. My way of working avoids this and produces more interesting and spontaneous results."

Technique

Pedro explains that his approach requires him to be quite close to the animal. "That's why I prefer to work with animals in

captivity. These can be zoos, but I have also worked in nature reserves, rescue centres and sanctuaries. Sometimes I have had the opportunity to work with animals in their natural habitat, but that makes the work too complicated for me."

And Pedro takes lots of photographs. As explained, he doesn't just show up and the perfect pose is presented to him, it's a matter of capturing first and reviewing later. "The selection phase can take a long time as you have to examine hundreds of photos thoroughly and I generally choose only one to work with. Not all photos lend themselves to this style, so before I start working, I have to visualise how they would look when finished.

"Once I choose the photo, the work will depend on the characteristics of the subject and the location. Sometimes I am lucky to have a naturally dark background and the post-production work is minimal. In other cases, I have to "burn" the background and carefully darken it so that the result does not look artificial. My intention is that there is no apparent difference between a photo taken in a studio and a photo taken in a natural environment with my applied technique.

"I believe that editing in photography is a resource that, used in the right way, enhances the message and the story you want to communicate. I try to convey a feeling, to get closer to the non-human animal, to create empathy. Except in photojournalism, I believe that a photographer should have absolute freedom to choose the means to express his or her creativity. At the end of the day, it is the public who will judge the result.

"I currently use Sony equipment. I used to work with other well known equipment. All these brands have exceptional products, but I have become more accustomed to Sony equipment because it offers me several technical advantages. In particular, I use a Sony A7R3, which offers a resolution of



42.4MP and is mirrorless, i.e. it is lighter and with a higher resolution that allows me to make bigger crops without losing too much quality. As for the lens, I most often use a Sony FE 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6 GM OSS and sometimes for larger subjects that are more distant, with a 1.4x teleconverter. To carry this equipment, I usually use a monopod which is more practical than a tripod."

Will Pedro's approach change with the introduction of AI? Will he even need a camera?

"The advent of AI has generated a lot of debate about the limits of its application, but I like photography and so personally I don't use AI. I don't like it because it's not real and I want to work with real, live animals. I want their expressions to be authentic.

"So, I'm not interested in generating any artificial elements or using the new AI tools for my work. I want to remain limited to what I can achieve with my camera and my interpretation of the scene with my personal style. I respect that other people may find AI attractive and I believe that artistic creation should not be limited, but for me, personally, I like the real rather than the artificial.

"On the other hand, capturing the image as raw file inevitably requires post-production. What you get out of the camera does not always reflect what you see with your eyes. It is necessary to process or 'develop' the photo so that it reflects what we have in our memory and in our personal perception. For me, the photo should reflect what I am feeling in a scene. It is a personal interpretation of reality. But for me, it is reality that must prevail."

Underlying Purpose

Pedro adds that his prime influences are not other wildlife photographers, but classical painters! "My sources of inspiration have always been the great masters of chiaroscuro, such as Rembrandt and Caravaggio. I like the drama of the darkness and the strokes of light that burst through the shadows. There's a whole technique for achieving this balance, because it's not enough to place a subject on a black background. There has to be an interaction between the highlights and the shadows for that drama to





have a positive effect. Whenever I can, I visit museums which have collections of the most famous representatives of this technique. I have a special predilection for the work of José de Ribera, a classic of the Spanish Baroque, a representative of the so-called 'tenebrism', which is chiaroscuro taken to an extreme.



"However, I also like the work of contemporary photographers, especially studio portraits, such as those made by Irving Penn."

Pedro is quite clear that his work has a purpose. "My message tries to be clear: this is the beauty we are about to lose. Most people love animals and I am sure no one would like to live in a world without them. And without them, we wouldn't survive either. We are at a crucial moment. If we do not react, it may soon be too late."

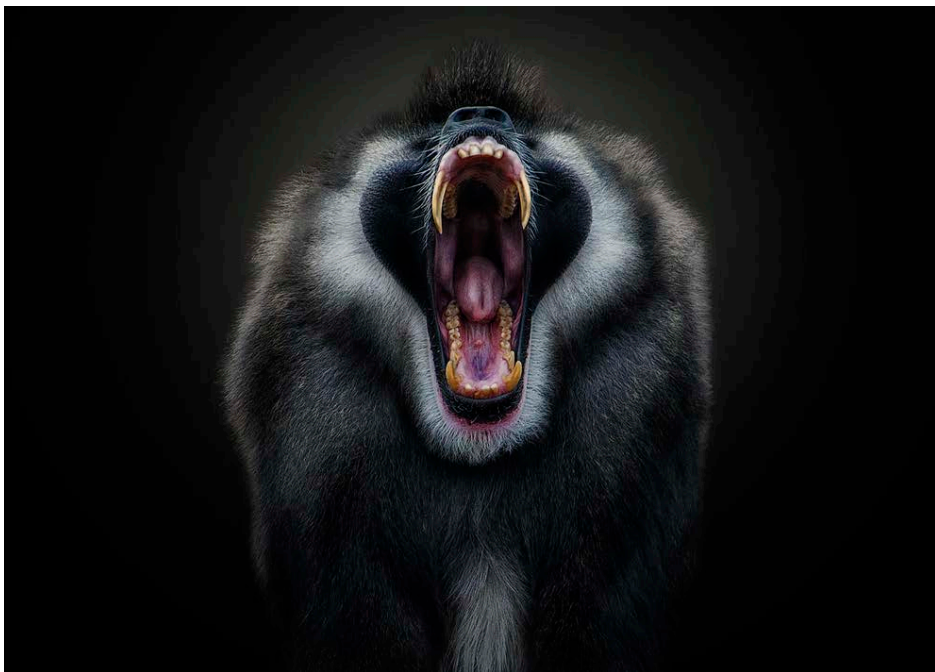
Pedro has already had one magnificent book published, *Fragile*, and is currently working on a second.

"The intention of my photographs was initially to focus on all kinds of animals, not just those that were in danger of extinction. Thirty years ago, there was not so much talk about this problem. However, as I prepared the photos for *Fragile* and learned more about each species, I discovered that there were actually many more animals threatened than I had suspected. In fact, almost all the animals in the book.

"Usually, when we think of endangered animals, we think of rhinos, elephants, polar bears or Bengal tigers, but the reality is much more alarming, because most wild animal populations have fallen sharply in recent decades – by 60% according to the WWF. Today, only 4% of the world's animals are wild. The majority, 96%, are humans and the animals we consume. Of birds, for example, only 30% are wild, the rest are chickens or poultry.

"So when I put the title to the book, *Fragile's* meaning became evident. All wild animals without exception are in an





extremely fragile situation. In a few decades we could lose up to 1 million living species. The most iconic may be the most easily recognised, but the entire ecosystem may be affected in unpredictable ways, even by the disappearance of species that at first sight seem irrelevant.

"Ultimately, even if we limit ourselves to a purely anthropocentric point of view, it is our own survival that is at stake.

"What I want to show with my photography is the soul of the animal. My intention is to show the beauty of that rich biodiversity with which we share the world, but which in our developed civilisations we no longer see, much less live with. I think that in a dramatic moment like the one we are living at present, it is essential to create awareness of this, because you can only defend what you love and you can only love what you know. There are people who have thanked me for making them recover their amazement and love for animals. And this is what really stimulates me to continue this work.

"Ultimately, I seek a reconciliation with the origins, with the primal and the archetypal. We have forgotten that we are also animals. We have forgotten our wild roots, in the good sense. We have forgotten our natural bond. We have created an insurmountable gap with the rest of the natural world that is leading us straight to the abyss. And we're only just beginning to realise it.

"Sometimes I use a metaphor: in our modern civilisation, it is as if we are travelling on a luxury train, with all the comforts,

completely ignoring that this train is running at full speed towards an abyss. I think we have a lot of challenges to solve as a species, but now there is only one really fundamental one for us: our own survival. That survival is intrinsically linked to the fate of every other living species on the planet. And that destiny is in our hands, exclusively.

"Our intellectual development and above all our moral conscience, have made us responsible for the destiny of all living beings on this planet. And according to the experts, we only have a window of two or three decades to reverse the destructive trend. So my job is to contribute to that reconciliation."

Is Pedro's message more effective when using popular subjects, rather than those that might be more obscure? Does this have an impact on what he photographs?

"I like all animals. Even the less popular ones. They all have a certain beauty and mystery. But it's true that the portraits that people like the most are usually of animals that are evolutionarily closer to us. If we see a pair of eyes, a nose and a mouth, then there is more chance of making a connection.

"There are hundreds of animals that I would like to work with, but because of their rarity, they are difficult to access. Many times I travel especially to photograph an animal that is only found in a specific place, such as the golden snub-nosed monkey, which is only found in China. Or when they are part of international breeding programs, like the Panda bear. In Madrid a pair of twins were born and I was lucky enough to

do a photo shoot with them. Also, the snow leopard is a rare specimen and I had to travel to photograph it. In Peru there is a great diversity of rare animals and I hope to be able to travel to the Amazon jungle soon."

Reading Pedro's thoughts, it's clear that his brilliant photography is not only the result of excellent craft, but of a deep passion for a cause he believes in. And it is this passion that shows through in his style – was this intentional?

"Having a personal stamp or style, I don't think it's something you plan. I think it's something that emerges as you perfect your work and refine it with your personal sensibility. Style is the fruit of your whole life, all your learning, your successes and your failures. Even your readings, your travels, your reflections and your way of seeing the world."

You can see more of Pedro's work on his website at <https://www.pedrojarque.com/>. You can purchase his existing book *Fragile* and when his new book is available, we'll let you know!

