



# 'HUMOUR IS PART OF THE EQUATION'

With ethics as important as style, Pedro Jarque Krebs wants his animal portraiture to engage us emotionally – and make us care what comes next

WORDS: GRAEME GREEN IMAGES: PEDRO JARQUE KREBS

**There's one particular animal from Peru that's globally famous, despite being incredibly rare – a talking, hard-staring, blue coat-wearing bear, who hides marmalade sandwiches under his hat.**

"I know Paddington Bear well," says Peruvian photographer Pedro Jarque Krebs. "I took my children to see his films. What I didn't remember was that his origin was Peruvian until I saw the trailer of the new film *Paddington In Peru*. Paddington looks more like a grizzly bear or a brown bear, but I imagine it was more exotic for storytelling purposes to say he came from Peru."

The spectacled, or Andean, bear that Paddington is said to be lives mainly in central Peru. An endangered species, it is rare to see them in the wild. Jarque photographed one of the real, non-fictional bears in 2019 at Huachipa Zoo in Peru's capital Lima.

"It was very hot and these bears are shy, so he hid and I didn't have time to take more than a couple of pictures," says Jarque. "Spectacled bears are darker than Paddington, almost black, and they have the half-white colour around the eyes, like glasses. It has to be said Paddington is much cuter than the real bears."

While Jarque's subjects don't speak or cause chaos across London, the photographer strives to present a sense of each one's individual charm or 'character'. As seen in his new book *WildLOVE*, which features colourful close-up images taken in Peru and around the world, there's plenty of cuteness – as well as humour, tenderness and even occasionally grumpiness or menace – in his work.



'Andean bear' by Pedro Jarque Krebs

"Although my desire is not to humanise animals, I believe we share many abilities to express emotions such as joy, sadness, fear, pain and even love and compassion," explains Jarque. "The more complex the animal on the evolutionary scale, such as mammals, the more capable they are of experiencing these feelings, but we also see this in many other species, such as birds. Humour's also part of the equation. I've seen young gorillas having a lot of fun and playing pranks on each other, or young panda bears being very mischievous."

Born in Lima, Peru in 1963, Jarque was fascinated by wildlife and photography from an early age. "Tadpoles and frogs were my obsession when I was 10 years old," he says. "Near my house in Lima, there was a pond that would fill up with tadpoles. I was fascinated by the process of metamorphosis. I took some of them to an aquarium I had at home to watch them grow, and started photographing them with an old analogue camera. That's when my passion for photography and wildlife began."

Aged 20, Jarque moved to Paris, later graduating from the Sorbonne University with a degree in philosophy of sciences. It was the start of a life on the move. From France, he relocated to Mexico (his wife is Mexican), dividing his time over the following decades between Peru, Mexico, France and Spain.

His photographic work has won recognition at international competitions including the Sony World Photography Awards, Bird Photographer of the Year and the 2023 World Photo Annual awards. It continues to take him to nations across Europe including Germany, Belgium, France, Portugal, Italy and Slovakia, and further afield, from Mexico and Peru to China. He spends most of his time in Spain, though returns frequently to his home country.

His portraits would be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve in the wild. Instead, Jarque photographs animals in captive or controlled situations, working with organisations such as the Madrid Zoo and Rainfer Primate Rescue Centre in Spain.

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'The boss' by Pedro Jarque Krebs

**“Having a personal stamp isn’t something that’s planned. It comes naturally as you refine your work”**

“My style requires an unusually close interaction with animals,” Jarque says. “To capture the poses and expressions I need it’s essential to have them nearby and, if possible, in a familiar environment. I’ve worked with sanctuaries, zoos, wildlife refuges and nature reserves, but also with animals in the wild.

“I collaborate only with centres that uphold impeccable ethical standards and, crucially, develop conservation programmes or participate in international initiatives for the reintroduction of species that have become extinct in the wild. I’ve worked with several rescue centres that save animals from illegal trade. For smaller, manageable animals, I occasionally use a photo studio, but I generally prefer not to disturb the animals and to capture more natural, stress-free poses.”

The bold look of his images has evolved over time.

“Having a personal stamp isn’t something that’s planned,” Jarque suggests. “It comes naturally as you refine your work. ‘Style’ is the result of a lifetime of learning, including your successes and failures. It’s also influenced by your reading, travels, reflections and the way you see the world.



‘Godzilla’ by Pedro Jarque Krebs



‘Fibonacci’ by Pedro Jarque Krebs

“My main source of inspiration is the classical Baroque painters, such as Rembrandt and Caravaggio, especially for their masterful handling of light and shadow in the style known as chiaroscuro. I strive to learn by closely observing their works, and that’s where I think my path is going – to perfect the balance of light and shadow.

There are parallels between Jarque’s work and that of Tim Flach HonFRPS. Both photographers capture close-up portraits in controlled settings that have a sense of fun and that highlight the beauty of animals. As with Flach, or *National Geographic*’s Joel Sartore, who also photographs animals at zoos and sanctuaries, Jarque often strips away background information to keep the focus on the animal.

“Before working with animals I photographed people in the studio,” he says. “In the analogue era, some 30 years ago, I enjoyed the quality of medium format with my Hasselblad 503CX, which brought a special sharpness and texture to studio portraits. Even at that time I was dreaming of doing the same with

wild animals, but logistically it was impossible to bring wild animals into my studio. It wasn’t only difficult, but also dangerous and unfeasible for many species.

“With the digital era everything changed – I no longer needed to bring the animals to my studio or improvise one where they were. I could photograph them in their environment without disturbing them and then darken the background to achieve the same effect as in the studio.”

The blank backgrounds can be achieved in-camera, and Jarque sometimes uses a black cloth for the background, or natural darkness such as in a cave. At other times the backdrop is changed in the computer edit. “Staging, lighting and contrast play a crucial role in the creation of these photographs,” says Jarque. “I’m always seeking to capture not only the appearance of the animal, but its essence and presence in the moment captured.”

Working with animals is difficult. “It takes time and a lot of patience to get the photos I want,” says Jarque.





‘Sunbath’ by Pedro Jarque Krebs

**“I want readers to pause at each image and see animals as beings with whom we share the planet, worthy of respect”**

“Sometimes sessions can be very long and still don’t produce the results I expect, while other times I get what I want quickly. Working with animals has its challenges, as they can’t be directed and they do as they please.

“The main advantage is that they often surprise you at unexpected moments and give you unique poses, but this forces you not to be distracted for a second. It has happened to me that I’ve missed an unrepeatable scene just by looking at the photos I had taken. Now, I don’t look at my photos until the session is over.”

In 2019, Jarque published his first book, *Fragile*, which sought to highlight the fragility of the natural world, with so many species disappearing from existence, largely due to human activity. *WildLOVE*, his second book, again showcases the diversity of the world’s wildlife, from iconic giants such as lions, giraffes, gorillas, rhinos, walruses and elephants, to mandrills, koalas, sloths, otters, seahorses and a three-metre long paiche fish. Also included is an array of birds – secretary birds, flamingos, Dracula parrots, shoebills, toucans and more.

“The main idea of the book is to convey the importance of recognising consciousness in animals,” explains Jarque. “Each of these species has been chosen, not only for their rarity or visual appeal, but in many cases for their ability to convey emotion through the lens. We wanted to ensure each photograph told a story and reflected the consciousness and feelings of the animals, revealing their inner lives in a way we often overlook.

“Through my encounters with various species I realised animals not only react instinctively to their environments but they also have conscious experiences, emotions and complex relationships. This book seeks to challenge the traditional perception of animals as inferior or merely instinctual beings.”

Jarque sees *WildLOVE* as “not just a book of photographs, but a call to empathy and reflection. I want readers to pause at each image and see animals as beings with whom we share the planet, worthy of respect and protection.”



'Tango' by Pedro Jarque Krebs

Paddington aside, Peru is better known for its markers of ancient civilisations – from Machu Picchu to the Nazca Lines – than for animals. The country's wildlife is less appreciated internationally than that of countries in geographical regions such as Africa. There is, though, far more to Peru's natural world than people might think, with more than 60% of Peru's territory covered by the Amazon rainforest.

"The jungle alone covers some 783,000 km<sup>2</sup>, around three times the size of the United Kingdom," says Jarque. "With 1,879 bird species, Peru is the world's leading country in terms of bird diversity –

it's an ornithologist's paradise. But it's not just about birds. The Amazon's teeming with all kinds of animals, from insects, reptiles and amphibians to large mammals such as jaguars, one of my favourite local species. I also love the condor, and the paiche is a very interesting fish. Then you have llamas, alpacas and vicuñas in Peru, but also less well-known species such as the Humboldt penguin, the pink dolphin and the bald uakari."

He continues, "Africa's the cradle of the most iconic animals, such as lions, elephants, giraffes, zebras and rhinos. But the biodiversity of the



'Two queens' by Pedro Jarque Krebs

'Odile' by Pedro Jarque Krebs





'At your level' by Pedro Jarque Krebs

**“I’m hopeful there’s a better chance the rainforest will be protected and the eco-tourism that’s being developed will help to preserve it”**

American continent is overwhelming. The jungles are teeming with life, perhaps not as iconic, but maybe more mysterious and surprising. It’s estimated we know only 20% of the world’s animal species, and the vast majority of those yet to be discovered are hidden in these jungles, waiting for us to photograph them.”

As in Brazil, the biodiverse Peruvian Amazon faces serious threats. “Much of the Peruvian Amazonian rainforest has been untouched and protected,” says Jarque. “But the unstoppable growth of the human population and its economic needs has affected this territory, with deforestation continuing to be a significant problem, driven mainly by illegal agriculture, illegal mining – particularly gold – and illegal logging.

“I’m hopeful that, with the increased awareness of environmental protection that has developed in recent years, there’s a better chance the rainforest will be protected and the eco-tourism that’s being developed will help to preserve it. The new generations are much more aware of these problems and I think they’ll be better prepared to face them. Today, this territory is undoubtedly being watched over much more than before.”

It isn’t just the wildlife of South America, Central America and Mexico that has been overlooked or undervalued by the wider world. Wildlife photographers from Latin America have also generally received less attention than their counterparts in the US, UK, Europe or Africa. That, too, is gradually changing.

“There are many extraordinary photographers in Latin America, but perhaps fewer than in more economically developed countries,” suggests Jarque.

“Making a living from wildlife photography isn’t easy, but in spite of everything new technologies are democratising photography. Nowadays, almost everyone has a camera in their pocket. This doesn’t necessarily make you a photographer, but it does open up the opportunity to discover new hidden talents. Latin America is a young continent that has a lot to contribute to the world in the future – and with a fresher outlook.”

*WildLOVE* by Pedro Jarque Krebs is published by teNeues at £29.95. [teneues.com](http://teneues.com) [pedrojarque.com](http://pedrojarque.com)



'The sin eater' by Pedro Jarque Krebs