

Wild at the Zoo!

An Urban Safari for Photographers

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North Haven Camera Club

Download

CCullens.com/zoo



Photos by Chane & Rhonda Cullens

Today's Roadmap

1

Understand key techniques for zoo photography.

2

Learn how to capture photos suitable for nature or other competitions in a zoo setting.

3

Gain confidence in photographing animals in captivity and in the wild.

Zoo Photography

Nature Competition

Why Zoos are Unique

Pre-Game Plan

Obstacle Course

Creating Impact

Camera Settings

Q&A



Don't Panic! We'll get through it all.

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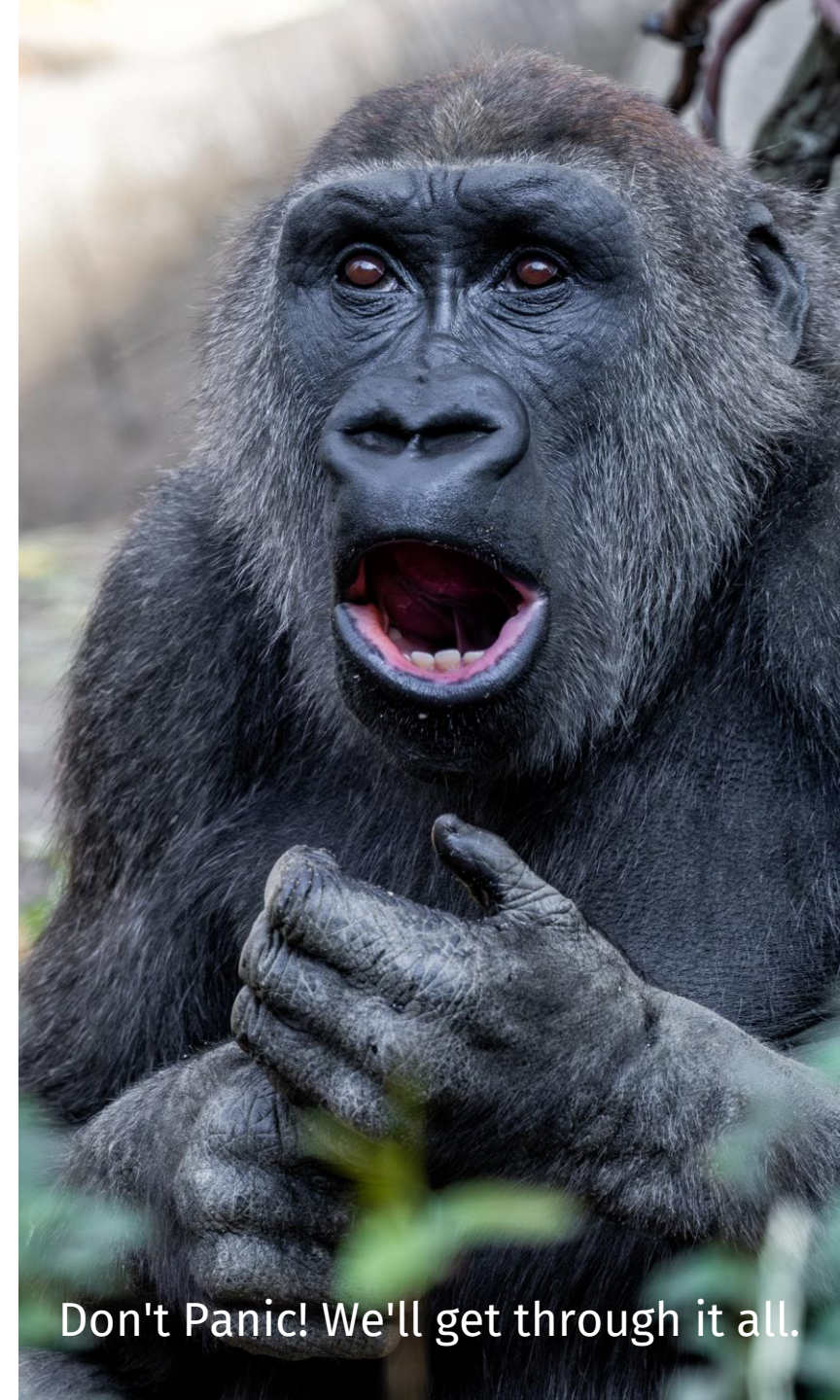
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Zoo
Photos
Win Local
and NECCC
Awards



Zoo Photos Expand Beyond Nature Category



NECCC 1st Place - Monochrome **Portrait** category



CAP 1st - Place **Portrait** category



NECCC – Honor Award
– **Open Color**



2nd Place - **Assigned Subject** – “I’m so **Blue**”. A Meal Cures the Blues



Navigating Nature Rules

Nature rules vary widely with every camera club and competition type.

Understanding the rules is a key part of entering Nature photos.



Allowed?

club's Nature rules?

NORTH HAVEN
PSA NATURE GUIDE FOR
PHOTOGRAPHERS &
JUDGES, 2021 – 23 PAGES

Flagpole

Photographers

Camera Club

Nature Rules

Depicts our world without any sign of human-made artifacts.

Editing must maintain a natural look, and adding elements is not allowed. Also, borders are not allowed.

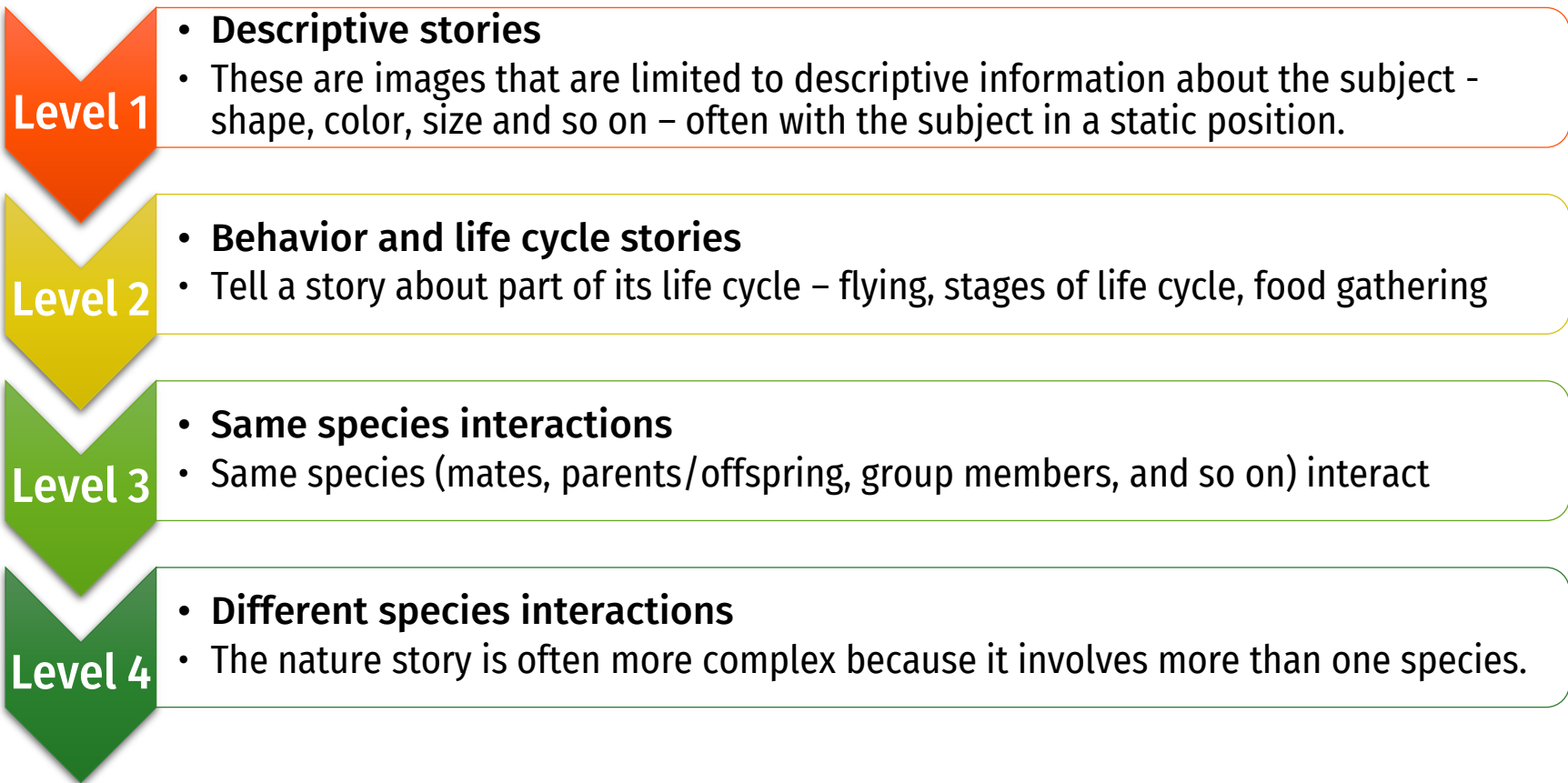
Banded or tagged animals are allowed. However, tame or wild domesticated animals are not allowed.

In addition to the rules for all categories. For example, captured by you, edited by you ...

The 4 Levels of Storytelling by PSA

Nature Images Must Tell a Story

The Levels of storytelling described below are intended only as a guide to help judges distinguish between weak and strong nature stories



High technical standards are expected at all levels.

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Zoos Are a Unique Opportunity to Capture Amazing Photos

**Around
the
World
Safari**

- In One Day
- Lots of Animals
- Inexpensive



Zoo Visits - The Reality of the Numbers

You've had a great photo day if 1% are competition photos!

Captured 3,754 photos in one day at Bronx Zoo

Continues for a mile

Edited 27 (0.72%)

Used 9 (0.24%)

Chane's
Photo
Zoo
Adventures

International - Johannesburg (2015), Sydney (2015, 2018), India (2018), Singapore (2019).

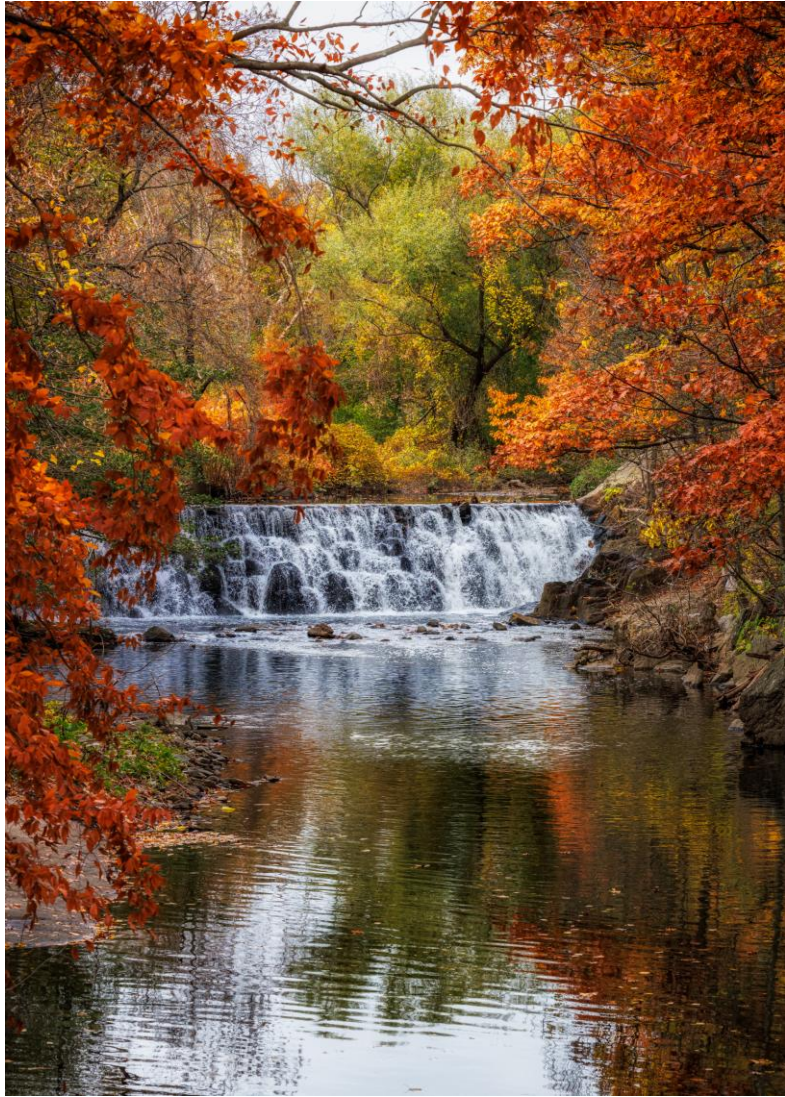
USA (West/South) - Dallas (2017), Fort Worth (2018), Phoenix (2019), Oregon (2016, 2018, 2025).

USA (East) - Bronx (2017, 2021, 2023, 2025), Beardsley (2025)



Outdoor and Indoor Opportunities





Also
Non-Nature
Photo
Opportunities

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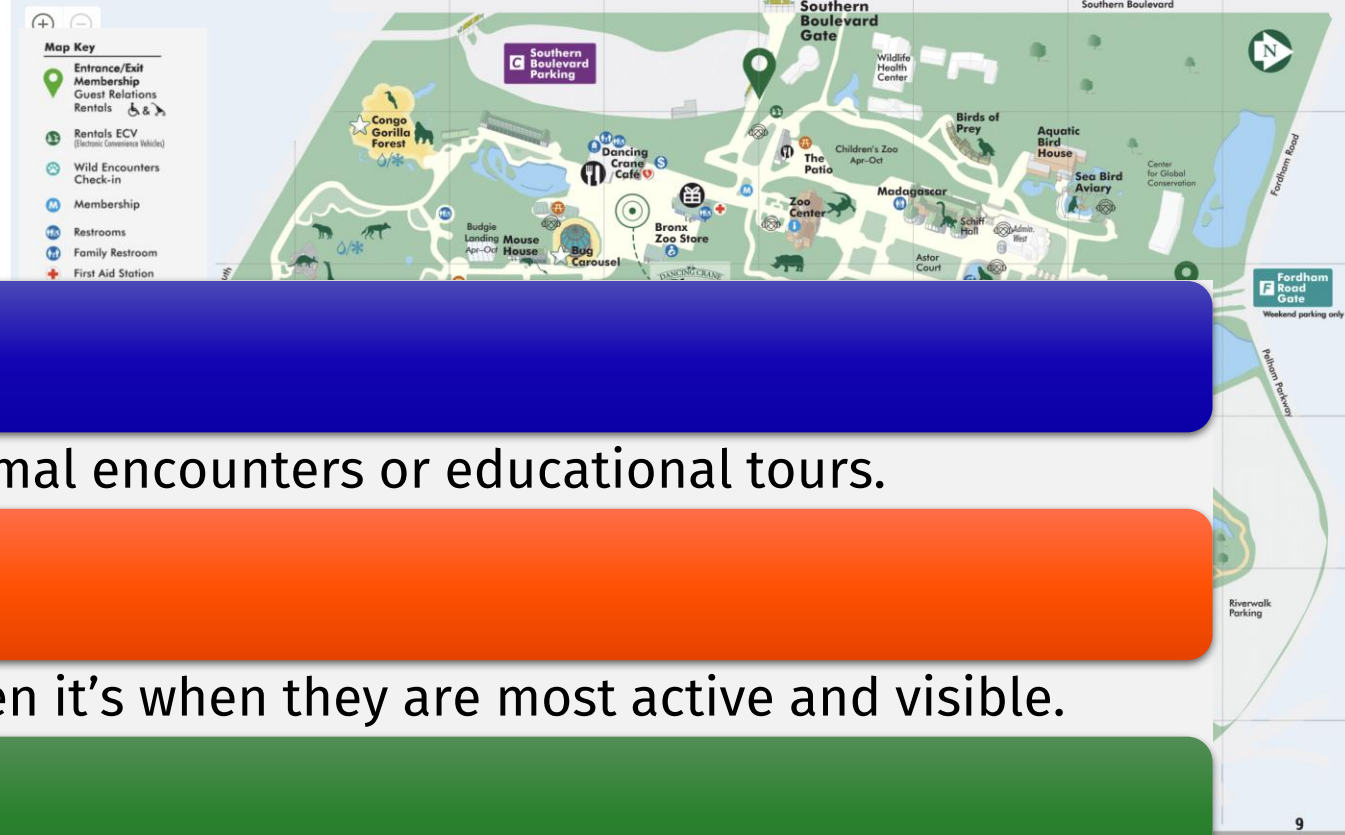
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What



Research Zoo Activities

- Check the daily schedule for specific animal encounters or educational tours.

Target Feeding Times

- Identify when animals are being fed, often it's when they are most active and visible.

Master the Map

- Study the layout ahead of time to prioritize the exhibits with your "must-see" list.

Skip the Lines

- Buy your tickets online to maximize your time behind the lens rather than in a queue.

Home Base

- Identify a central location as a mid-day meetup point to exchange ideas.

When?

- **During Off-Peak Times**
 - Go weekdays and early mornings.
 - Avoid special days, summer and school breaks.
- **The Bonus**
 - Check your local library for discount passes.



Wednesday, November 17, 2021, at 11:30 am.
Bronx Zoo parking lot is nearly empty!

Dress for the Success



Layer Up

- Easy to remove layers, as you will be moving between outdoor paths and humid, heated indoor exhibits.



Check the Forecast

- Overcast days act as a natural diffuser
- Raining days animals often hide, reschedule.



Footwear Matters

- Expect to walk several miles; prioritize comfort over style to stay focused on your shots.

“Lean & Mean” Gear Bag



Limit Your Lens

Bring at most one extra lens to keep your kit lightweight and mobile.

Leave the Extras

No tripods and no flash. Often prohibited and are obstacles in crowded areas.

Power Up

Bring extra batteries.

Storage

Think of 1,000s of photos as normal.

Personal Essentials

Don't forget water and snacks to maintain your energy levels.

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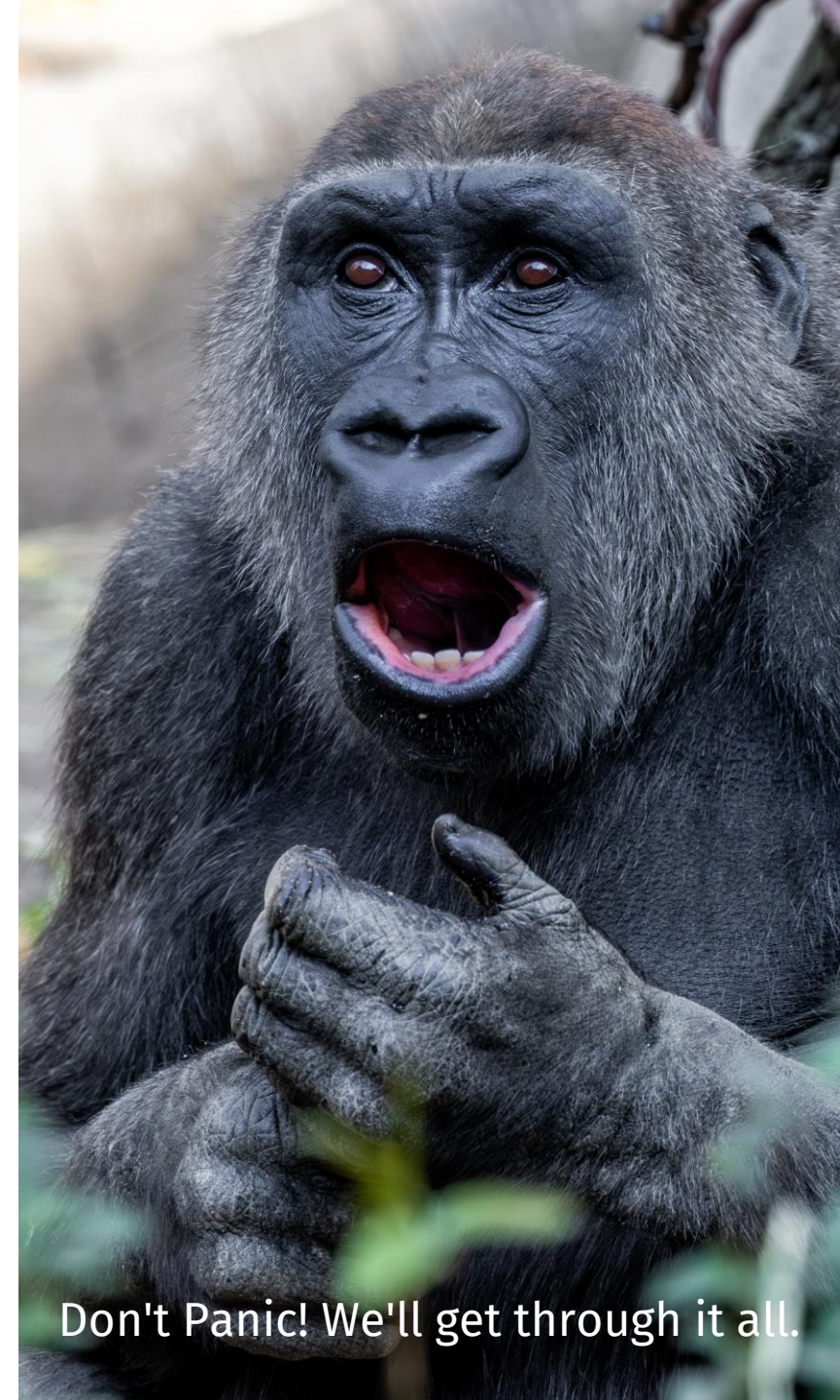
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The Obstacle Course

Backgrounds

Cages

Fences

Glass

Lighting

People

Restricted
Views

Safety

Watch Your Backgrounds



Sharp edge implies non-nature and
distracts viewer



Making Wire Vanish

What matters is the physical size of the aperture opening (entrance pupil), not just the f-number. A larger entrance pupil makes the fence blur away because the lens can effectively “see around” the wire. This is why 200mm f/4 can outperform a 50mm f/1.8.

Get camera close to fence

Better when the animal is far from the fence

Focus on the animal

Use longer focal length, zoom in!

Try an aperture width wider than the wire

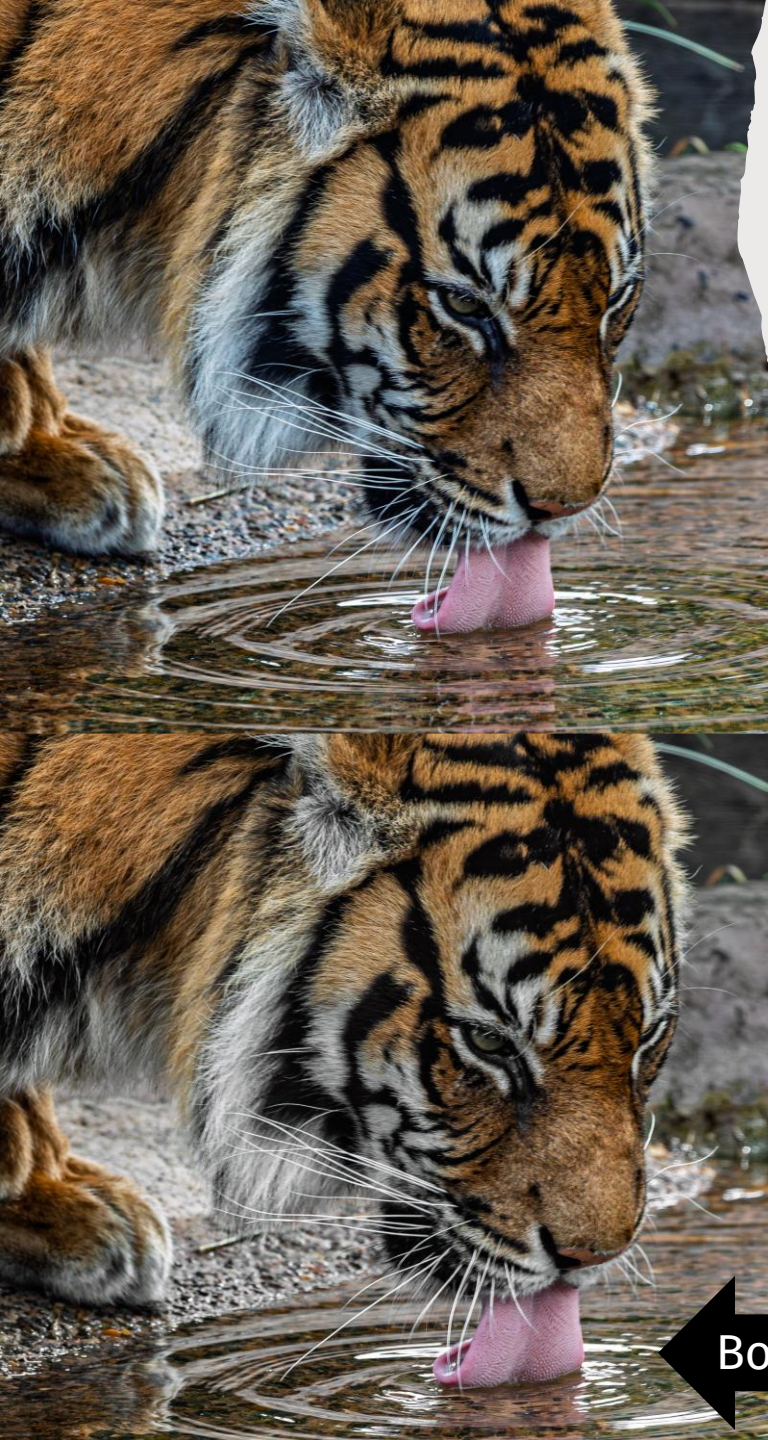


Overcoming Fences

Prepare. I arrived 10 minutes before to watch the cheetah "Run" event.

Practiced, practiced ... on a dog inside the fence.

Camera settings: ISO 1250, f/5.6, 1/8000, 200 mm, Servo tracking focus



Conquering Glass Walls

Align your lens

- Position your camera so the lens is perfectly parallel with the glass to minimize optical distortion.

Minimize the gap

- Get your lens as close to the glass as possible to reduce unwanted reflections and glare.

Shield the lens

- Place a dark coat, scarf, or lens hood against the glass around the lens to block out ambient light and further eliminate glare.

Correct in post-processing:

- Adjust your color settings after the shoot to remove any blue or green color cast caused by the glass.

← Bottom photo has blue tint removed.

Lighting

Outdoor Lighting

- **Choose overcast weather days:** Clouds act as a giant natural diffuser.
- **Handle harsh sun:** Seek out animals located in the shade.
 - Adjust your exposure compensation to between **-2/3 and -1.0**.
- **Utilize "Semi-Golden" hours:** Arrive when the zoo opens or stay until it closes.

Indoor Lighting

- **Maximize your ISO:** Increase ISO settings to handle lower light levels indoors.
- **Shoot in RAW:** Use RAW format for post-processing white balance correction.
- **Avoid flash:** Do not use a flash when shooting in indoor exhibits.

People

The Good

- Friends add enjoyment.



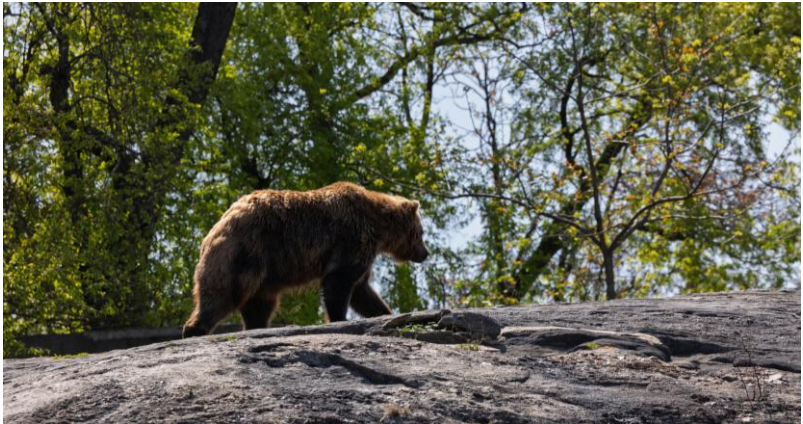
The Bad

- Crowd limits your view.



The Ugly

- Be respectful.



Restricted Views

Find every viewpoint. Watch for patterns. Be patient.



Safety

Respect Railings

- Barriers are designed to protect the animals, your gear, and your physical safety.

Keep Paths Clear

- Be mindful of your equipment to ensure you and your gear do not become trip hazards for others.

Prioritize Welfare

- Respect animal health by never offering outside food and no flashes to avoid startling them.



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The Four Legs of Impact

Impactful photos evoke laughter, sadness, anger, pride, or wonder.

Think of
IMPACT
as a stool supported by these
four legs:



Photo Structural Integrity

- 4 legs** Solid: Hard to knock over
- 3 legs** Stable: Still very strong
- 2 legs** Weak: Hard to stand up
- 1 leg** Critical: Easily falls over
- 0 legs** It's a snapshot

Storytelling
Evokes emotion

Creativity
Offers a fresh view

Composition
Guides the eye

Technical
Skillfully crafted

Creating Impact

A photo **of something** aims to represent it.

A photo **about something** aims to tell a story.

Stories add impact!



When you want a donut but get kale instead!



Visual Storytelling

Compose To Tell a Story

Capturing the Moment

Lighting is Key

- Overcast days also provide excellent lighting conditions.

Focus on the Eyes

- Capturing sharp, expressive eyes is crucial for creating a connection with the viewer.

Capture Animal Behavior

- Strive to capture animals exhibiting natural behaviors such as eating, playing, or interacting.
- These photos tell a story and provide a glimpse into the animal's world.

Don't Overlook the Details

- Capture unique textures, patterns, and colors by focusing on details like fur, feathers, or scales.
- Close-up shots can add variety and interest.

Animal Behavior Isn't Always Predictable

Just when you think things are going well...





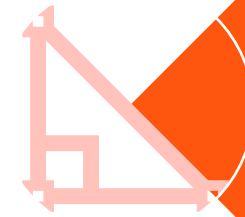
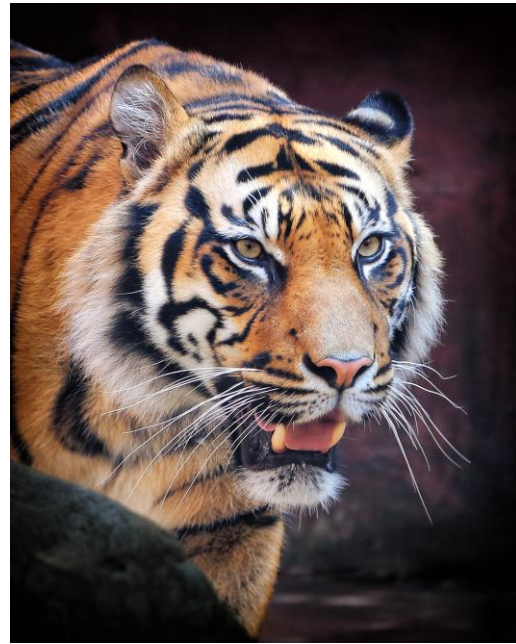
Composition - Get Close and Personal

Use your feet, zoom in or crop to get close-up shots.

Fill the frame with your subject to capture intricate details.

Create a sense of intimacy and connection with the animals.

Find Unique Perspectives



Explore different angles and viewpoints to capture unique compositions.



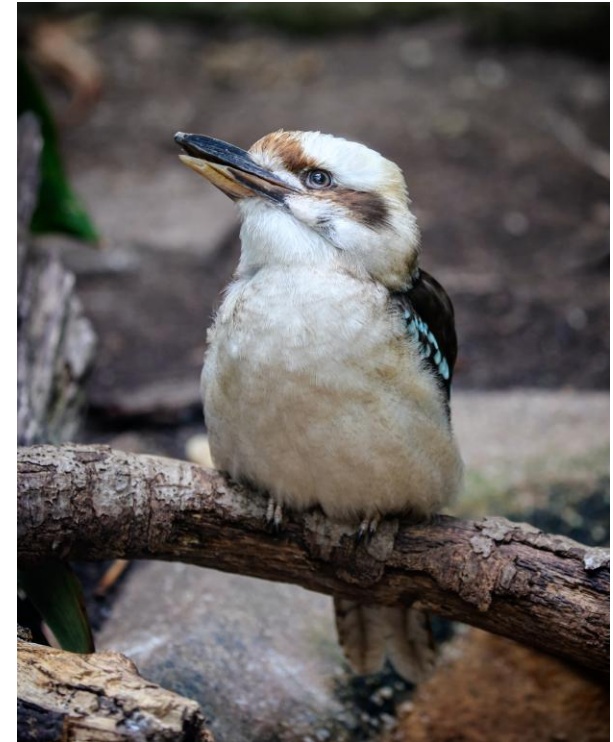
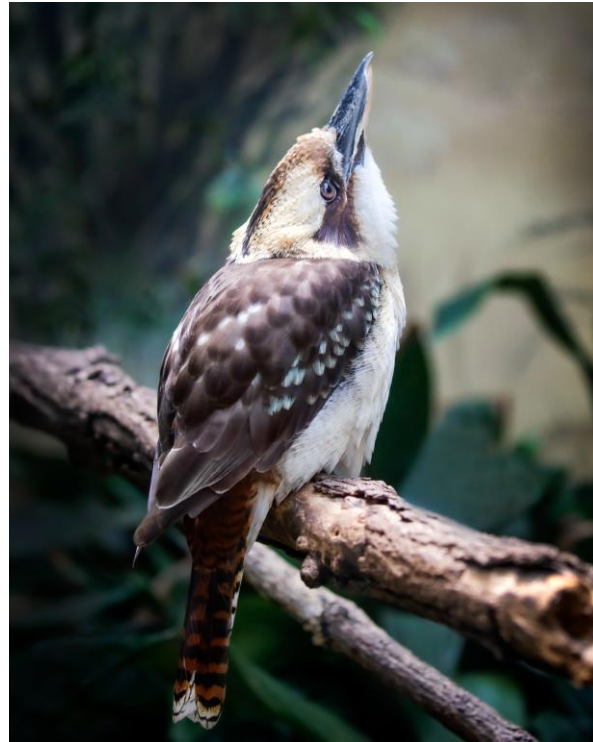
Try shooting from above, below, or through foliage to add depth and interest.



Camera at **their** eye level.

Work the Scene

Do a whole photo shoot on one subject.





The 360° View

Don't forget to look behind you! And behind your subject!

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Don't Panic! Almost to the end!

Dialing in the Settings

Leverage **Aperture Priority** mode for simplicity in the zoo's ever-changing environment.

Aperture

To minimize the background distractions

f/3 to f/7 for small to medium focus depth

Shutter Speed

To freeze animals' movement

Walking 1/250,
Running 1/1000,
Flying 1/2000

ISO

As high as needed to meet your shutter speed requirement

Nailing the Focus

Eyes in Focus

Eyes draw viewers' attention

Continuous Tracking

Use Servo Tracking functionality

Leverage Eye Tracking

Very handy Eye Tracking + Servo Tracking

Shooting Mode

High speed continuous



Storage for 1,000+ photos

Choosing the Right Glass



Zoom lens

Provides flexibility without changing lens



100mm or greater

Allows greater freedom of finding a vantage point



f/4ish

Increases background blur

Chane's Favorites: 100-500mm f/4.5-7.1 or 70-200mm f/2.8

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Don't Panic! We'll make to the end.

A group of people, mostly photographers, are gathered on a paved path in a wooded area. In the center, a man in a light blue shirt and khaki pants is speaking and gesturing with his right hand. He is holding a camera with a large lens. To his left, a woman in a white shirt and dark pants is also holding a camera. In the foreground, a woman with a large black backpack and a man in a plaid shirt and cap are looking towards the speaker. On the right, a woman in a grey bucket hat and a woman in a light blue shirt are also looking towards the speaker. The background shows a dense forest with tall trees and green foliage. The text "Questions & Answers" is overlaid in the center of the image in a white, serif font.

Questions & Answers