

PRO SHOWCASE

AMAZING IMAGES AND INSIGHT
FROM THE WORLD'S BEST
PHOTOGRAPHERS

THE POLAR EXPLORER

Searching for elusive Polar creatures in brutal -50°C temperatures and 60km/h winds is just another day at the office for extreme wildlife photographer Daisy Gilardini.



Daisy Gilardini is a wildlife photographer based in British Columbia, Canada. She's been featured in *National Geographic* and *BBC Wildlife*, and worked for Greenpeace. daisygilardini.com





FEELING THE RAW STING of glacial temperatures while trudging through several feet of snow isn't everyone's idea of the perfect commute, but Daisy Gilardini is used to forging her own path. With over two decades of experience photographing the world's most elusive animals in unforgiving Polar environments, Daisy is a truly intrepid wildlife photographer and a passionate advocate for vitally important conservation efforts.

How did you first become interested in photography?

As a child I grew up with the idea of becoming a veterinarian, as I've always loved nature and animals. However, life often doesn't go quite as you expect it to, and I ended up becoming a certified expert in

finance and accounting in my native Switzerland. After earning my masters degree, I opened my own accounting firm. With a good business plan and organisational skills, I managed to juggle my love for travel, nature and photography with my day job commitments. I started taking off on assignments for several months a year, and had to hire an assistant to help me out with the accounting business.

However, every time I returned to my office I started to feel a little depressed and unfulfilled. I began writing articles and looked for magazines interested in publishing my work. It was like having two full-time jobs. My days would begin at 7am and finish at midnight, seven days a week. They say that the key to success is to believe in one's ability, and that's what I did. Patience, passion and perseverance eventually led to success, and I finally succeeded in having my work published. This led to me being able to become a full-time photographer in 2006.

How did you become interested in wildlife?

My love for wildlife began long ago. I was only four years old when I received a little stuffed seal puppy as a gift from my godparents. My mum explained that the seal puppy came from a very cold place, living on

and under the polar ice. I was mesmerised by these stories, and from that moment on I dreamed to be able to see them in their natural environment. It took me seven years to be able to save the money necessary to pay for a trip to Antarctica, but that adventure totally changed my life. Since then, I've joined almost 70 expeditions to the Polar Regions. I've tried many times to understand this irresistible attraction to the Polar areas, which I'd define as almost an addiction. These extreme adventures transport me out of my ordinary world and lead me on a voyage of self-discovery. The isolation from modern civilisation, and all the distractions that come with it, allows me to focus on the simple rhythm of nature.

Why is photography important to you?

Over the years I've developed my own language and style. I don't create images. Rather, I feel that I'm just a witness and interpreter for Mother Nature. When shooting landscapes and wildlife, I focus on composition. I want to be able to convey emotions by simplifying the shapes. Photography isn't just an art form. It's one of the most important and powerful mediums of communication that we have. As environmental photographers, it's our duty to capture

the beauty of places and species that are at risk in order to raise awareness. While science provides the data necessary to explain problems and suggest solutions, photography is able to symbolise these issues. Science appeals to the mind, but photography speaks to the heart. We need both in order to spread the message effectively to as many people as we can.

What's your favourite image?

During my first trip to Antarctica in 1997, I photographed an iceberg that was shaped as a heart. Besides winning a major award in 2000, this image has become very symbolic to me. During that first trip, I left a piece of my heart in Antarctica. Ever since then, I have to go back every year to check on it.

How do you deal with the harsh environments you work in?

As an environmental photographer specialising in the Polar Regions, the challenges are mostly related to the extreme environment in which I work. The cold affects both my equipment and my body. If I'm not comfortable then I'm not able to focus on my job, so preparation is very important. Dressing in layers is vital. The air trapped between the many thin, warm

Above Emperor penguin parents feed their chick at Snow Hill Island in Antarctica.

Above left An adult king penguin calls for his chick among the crèches in South Georgia.

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“I ONCE SPENT 13 DAYS IN FRONT OF A POLAR BEAR DEN...”

layers is an excellent insulator. You can strip them off, one at a time, if the temperature climbs. Perspiration is your worst enemy in a cold climate. If left unchecked it can be a trigger for hypothermia. That's why you absolutely have to avoid any sweat by taking off as many layers as you can while walking or climbing. As soon as you stop and set up your gear, you need to put back on the warmest clothing, as quickly as you can, so that the heat generated by the physical exercise is trapped around your body.

Have you ever had a nightmare shoot?

In April 2011, I organised an expedition to Banks Island, in Canada's Beaufort Sea, in the Northwest Territories. I was there to photograph musk ox, Arctic hares, Arctic wolves and snowy owls. When I was there I experienced unusually stormy weather and temperatures dropping to under -30°C. These extreme conditions, combined with travelling by ski, lodging in a non-heated hunters' hut and being accompanied by an incompetent and irresponsible guide to boot, made me fear for my life. It got to the point where I felt I had no other choice but to abort the expedition. It took me many months, and some serious debriefing with expert polar guides, to get my confidence back.

Do you have a favourite story from your experiences shooting these locations?

In 2015 I spent 13 days in front of a polar bear den waiting for the mother to emerge with her four month-old cubs. I looked at the same few trees and snow for 117 hours, in temperatures between -45°C and -50°C and winds gusting up to 60km/h. Finally, on the last day of the expedition the bear emerged, followed by a single cub. Only a few hundred people have ever witnessed the exit of newborn polar bears from the den. Emotionally, that was one of the highlights of my entire career as a photographer.

How much preparation goes into your shoots?

It's essential to know your subject in wildlife photography, as this helps you anticipate behaviour and catch the magic moment. Returning to the same locations year after year will give you a better understanding of the light conditions at any given time. Spending a large amount of time with and among wild animals will give you the opportunity to know single individuals, which allows you to come up with something new and different. It takes time and knowledge to capture their personalities and freeze those anthropomorphic expressions that are essential

Above Portrait of an emperor penguin chick at Snow Hill Island in Antarctica.

Above left Waspuck National Park in Manitoba, Canada is the southernmost denning area for polar bears.

Left Antarctic Weddell seals usually come to land to rest and digest after spending time in the water fishing.



Above A gentoo penguin colony huddled together during a snow storm at Pleneau Island in the Antarctic Peninsula.

to making a connection with the viewer. Photography is a universal language. I strongly believe in the sheer power of images to stir emotions and touch people's hearts, all while delivering a positive message about the environment. As a nature photographer, what I do inevitably has an impact on the places and the creatures I'm documenting. It's essential to limit this impact to a minimum, in the hope that the positive influence of my pictures in raising public awareness will compensate for any consequences my intrusion may have.

How do you behave around the wildlife?

I have very strong opinions on wildlife photography ethics, and adhere to the following rules religiously. I always respect the wildlife by keeping quiet and giving them space. I never chase the animals, and instead let them come to me. I also never feed them with dead or live bait. Outside of these firm rules, my

behaviour does change depending on the subject I'm photographing. For example, penguins are extremely friendly and curious animals, while polar bears are carnivorous, territorial predators. While I have no problem letting a penguin approach me, and even touch me, I'm much more cautious with polar bears.

What kit do you use and why?

I work in some of the most challenging environments on Earth, so I need to rely on extremely trustworthy and sturdy equipment. Nikon has never disappointed me. I always carry two bodies (one APS-C and one full-frame). I usually bring a 24-70mm f/2.8 and an 80-400mm f/4.5-5.6. By doing so, I can cover a range of 24mm to 600mm (when considering the APS-C body). Using zoom lenses also gives me more flexibility when shooting wildlife, where one's ability to move is often restricted to a minimum.

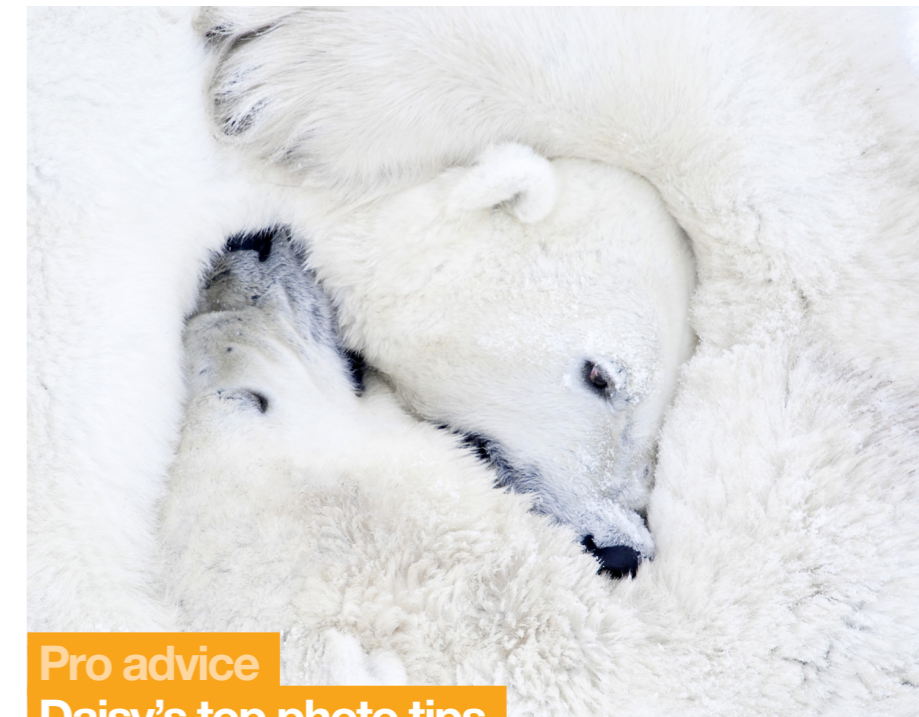
What's the most difficult part of wildlife photography?

Besides the challenges in the field dealing with the cold, I think that some of the most difficult situations any wildlife photographer has to face today are on the business side. With the internet, and the advent of

micro-stock, the market has never been so compromised. Everyone is looking for free or super low-cost images, without taking into consideration integrity or ethical photography – values that are unfortunately becoming rare. The use of captive animals, or baiting wild ones, in order to get 'the perfect shot', has sadly become a normal practice. In some situations, photographing captive animals may serve a specific conservation goal, but even then it must be governed by strong ethical rules about the welfare of the animal. Meanwhile, photos of captive animals should always be captioned as such. Last, but not least, the digital manipulation of images has become such a serious topic that the authenticity of every picture, and the integrity of the photographer, are almost always questioned nowadays. To improve the situation, it's our responsibility as photographers to clearly caption our images accordingly to indicate any alteration. I consider myself a purist, so any post-production I do is limited to the essential.

If you could give one piece of advice to budding photographers, what would it be?

In photography, as in life, I always apply my '3P' rule: passion, patience and perseverance.



Pro advice
Daisy's top photo tips

- 1 BE THERE**
It may sound silly, but if you're not there then you won't be able to get the picture. This means that you have to do your homework in order to always know where the best spot is at the best time of day. I'm on location ready to shoot usually one hour before sunrise, and I stay one hour after sunset. In the middle of the day, when the light is harsh and the animals are less active, I either work on my images or take a nap in order to rest for the next bit of shooting.
- 2 KNOW YOUR SUBJECT**
In wildlife photography it's essential to intimately know your subject. This will allow you to anticipate behaviour and catch the magic moment. Knowledge of your equipment will allow you to be fast enough to
- 3 FIND YOUR PASSION**
You'll soon find that the sheer love and passion you put into your photography will shine through in your images.
- 4 BE PATIENT**
There's definitely a lot of frustration involved in wildlife photography. You can spend hours and hours, or even days and weeks, at the mercy of challenging weather conditions in search of the perfect shot. Even then you're not guaranteed to get anything, and you may walk away with nothing. Patience is absolutely essential, as is perseverance. You will eventually succeed, even if it takes you multiple tries in order to get your desired shot. 📸

