AUSTRALIANA: A PHOTO-ESSAY

CHARLES DAVIS

Primarily focusing on Australian wildlife in and around my home in the Snowy Mountains region of New South Wales, I have been photographing the natural world around me for the past several years.

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My family has owned a sheep farm near Cooma, New South Wales, for six generations now; from this legacy I draw much of the inspiration for my work. The knowledge gained from and about the Australian High Country through generations of farming and hunting has for me been a tremendous asset in understanding the neighbouring animals and their habitats, and has allowed me entry into the world I try to show in my photographs.

I try to capture not just a portrait of an animal achieved with a long lens, but focus intimately instead on the habitat and the animal within it. In this sense, I work like a landscape photographer. The photographs I have chosen for this presentation are all from the Australiana region, and show not only the stereotypical Australian aridity and heat, but reveal also the lesser known habitats of the continent, where I begin.

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I have chosen five cold and five warm images to convey the harsh and beautiful environment in which I work and which I seek to present to the world through my images.
Eastern Fog

It was still early in the middle of winter when I drove in the fog to the bottom of our drive and saw there these Eastern Rosellas sitting on an old dead snow gum, lighting it up like a Christmas tree. Eastern Rosellas seldom expose themselves this way, and don’t usually flock together. This was indeed a rare moment, and I’m grateful to have had my camera at hand. The large green parrots are juvenile Crimson Rosellas.
Arctic Roo

On one of the coldest days of the year I could see the snow coming from the south, and so headed for Namadgi, a nearby national park frequented by kangaroos. When I arrived at Yankee Hat the snow was falling far off in the bush; I had to walk five kilometres to reach the scene I wanted. The walk was worth it; the flakes came down thick and heavy over the area as the roos hopped away to find better shelter. I returned home cold and very happy.
Icy Looks

I found this female eastern grey kangaroo—probably the coldest kangaroo you will ever see—high in the Australian backcountry during one of the worst storms of the season. She had ice all over her fur and could not hop because the snow was so deep. Under such conditions we both sheltered from the wind behind this snow gum, with the mutual understanding that the wind was scarier than either of us could possibly be to each other.
Praise to the Rain

Winner of the ANZANG 2014 monochrome category. The other roos had seen this many times and merely sat drenched and depressed, waiting for the storm to pass. The young bucks had something to prove, rearing back onto their tails to intimidate each other into submission.
Cascade Gallop

A small herd of wild horses galloping across the deep snow in the Australian Alps. These feral horses, descendants of escaped or lost horses from as far back as early European settlement, are locally called Brumbies, and are closely connected to Australian book culture and legend as propagated in the well-known “Silver Brumby” series of children’s novels by Elyne Mitchell. The books centre themselves around the ghost horse Thowra, King of the Cascade Brumbies; the books have been adapted as both a film and an animated television show, though the power of the living Alpine horses exceeds the mythography to which these magnificent animals are connected.
Drinking the Sunlight

On one of the hottest days of the year, I headed out in the hope of finding animals drinking in the evening light. Expecting kangaroos, I was very surprised to see this echidna wander past me. So thirsty was he that he simply looked at me once and continued straight on to the water. The light had already evaporated from the ground, but the afterglow on the trees illuminated the water as if by fire-light. I had never seen an echidna drink before; I may never again.
Eating the Sunset

A Bearded Dragon near Willandra National Park, New South Wales, basking in the last rays of sunlight on a small salt lake in a very flat area of Australia.
Fledglings

I watched these Wedge-tailed Eagle fledglings grow from small chicks into the impressive apex predators they were meant to be. Jill is closest, on the left; Blinky is on the right. They both had markedly different personalities. Jill hated me, while Blinky was as friendly as a puppy. This photograph was taken at twelve metres above the ground: I was hanging from one arm and shooting with the other. The next day both fledglings left the nest, and two months later left the area to find territories of their own.
Love Nest

These two black swans had made their nest amongst the reeds in a very protected nature reserve. I waited till the sun came out to light up the reeds, and for both swans to come together on the nest. I loved the contrasting colours and the striking red of the swans’ beaks.
Rotarua Stilt

Champagne Pool, a terrestrial hot spring near Rotorua on New Zealand’s North Island. This lone Pied Stilt was resting amongst the steaming minerals and amazingly variegated water colours caused by various bacteria together creating in this case something closely resembling a water-colour painting. Taken as it was in the middle of the day, I was lucky the scene came out as well as it did.

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