

WOOLFF **WOOLFF**



EIGHT FEET
GRAEME PURDY

Graeme Purdy

Wildlife photographer, Graeme Purdy, has spent decades studying and photographing wild animals in locations around the globe. Incredibly he has captured some of our planet's most dangerous and stunning wild animals from just eight feet or less away. This provides a different perspective on some of our favourite wildlife subjects by taking on the very real challenges of this type of photography.

“It is my aspiration to create a real sense of engagement with my subject and to try and convey an emotional connection.

There are many factors that help with this objective such as lighting conditions, the direction of light, the animal's behaviour or the environment and context of the shot. Many of these factors are not within the photographer's control so I wanted to experiment with one aspect and that was proximity.

It is intuitive that you want to edge closer to a subject to feel more connected but with wild animals, there are two factors we must consider. The first is that many animals can be dangerous in close proximity and the other is that most animals would prefer we stayed a 'comfortable' distance from them. So my goal was to capture unique images from 'inside their world', mostly with remote or 'mobile' cameras.

The approach for most wildlife photography is a little like watching a person or an event from the other side of the street using a long lens. You can clearly see the action but you are not particularly connected to it. I wanted to be part of what was going on which is akin to gate-crashing a party. You don't quite know whether you'll be welcome and you won't know until you try. This approach to photography is not without its challenges and risks but one thing about shooting from 'inside the party' is that you get to know the other guests extremely well. You learn first-hand when an animal has had enough of your company, some warnings are subtle and some are darn well aggressive. This is high octane photography, where field craft is paramount and you need to be prepared for your camera equipment to take a bit of rough and tumble.

I hope you enjoy the images and the stories”. GRAEME PURDY

Woolff Gallery is absolutely delighted to present this exhibition. These images capture the energy of these noble animals in such a unique and engaging way. Classically printed in Black and White, and beautifully presented, Purdy's timeless photographs are in keeping with the majesty and integrity of his inquisitive subjects. It is clear that extended periods of time were spent building sufficient trust with the animals, and the results allow us to glimpse into the personalities of the individual animals.

Purdy's book 'EIGHT FEET' will also be available to purchase at the exhibition. In the book, each portrait is accompanied with its own story. As Graeme explains: “It was not my original intention to provide a narrative for each image, but it felt such an injustice to try and present these animals stories with only an image. I felt these animals deserved more”. The stories written by Graeme give a moving insight into the animals behaviour and his experiences. All of the proceeds from this book go to National Park rescue (www.nationalparkrescue.com) which is a direct action charity tackling the chronic problems arising through poaching.

The following pages show images of the works available at the exhibition. The photographs are all framed and have a protective face mount. Alongside each image in the brochure is a short piece of text giving you a sense of what Graeme was considering whilst taking these shots.

Please contact Woolff Gallery for more information about any of these artworks, or for book enquiries.

POKER FACE

Buffalo are notoriously dangerous animals. Determining the thin line between an apparently passive buffalo and one that is about to charge can be tricky. For sure, never play poker against a buffalo. This image Purdy calls 'Poker Face' for good reason. Following this shot, the buffalo charged Purdy's remote control camera. Shots of the incident can be seen in Graeme Purdy's book 'Eight Feet' which accompanies the exhibition.

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Graeme Purdy, 'POKER FACE', Archival C-Type print with protective face mount, 152.4 x 100cm (print size) 160cm x 125cm (approx framed size)

ONE HIPPO

Hippos are very watchable. Often portrayed as deadly, and the scenes of them fighting are certainly good images, but Purdy wanted to show the flipside of hippos. The quirky and almost comical side. Rather than the open-mouthed Hippo with huge tusks, Purdy's Hippo is a likeable animal that makes you smile and leaves you impressed, not intimidated

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Graeme Purdy, 'ONE HIPPO', Archival C-Type print with protective face mount,
152.4 x 100cm(print size) 160cm x 120cm (approx framed size)

DON'T MESS WITH ME

Hyena often run, walk and stand with their heads low. This submissive pose somehow accentuates the misconception that they are the 'baddies' of the Savannah. Purdy wanted an image of Hyena that showed them in a different light and more reflective of this powerful canine predator.

Hyena have a bite that allows them to crunch through bone, a camera would be no match. As he wanted to be looking right up at the Hyena, this meant letting them approach to 2 feet. Fortunately, on this occasion they were not aggressive, but merely inquisitive and curious to check out the newcomer.

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Graeme Purdy, 'DON'T MESS WITH ME', Archival C-Type print with protective face mount, 152.4 x 101.2cm (print size), 160cm x 110cm (approx framed size)

MEGA STAG

Purdy's project started close to home with the famous Red Deer in Richmond Park, London. As he experimented with different remote camera options, he started to understand deer behaviour from a new perspective. He spent over 50 days shooting the deer and at times his objective of up-close-and-personal with the biggest of stags seemed impossible.

This image is called 'Mega Stag' as it is these mature deer in their prime that boast such impressively large antlers. They are not as aggressive as some of the younger deer, but they are often aloof and difficult to approach. This Mega Stag did not fit the mould. His stance and the threatening angle of his antlers is his way of saying that he means business and has no intention of backing down. There was enough time to take the shot from about 3 feet away and slowly retreat.

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Graeme Purdy, 'MEGA STAG',
Archival C-Type print with
protective face mount
152.4 x 115cm (print size)
160cm x 125cm (approx framed size)

FOUR STAGS

This image of four Red Deer stags shows the next generation lining up to become head of a harem of females. These stags are a couple of years away from full maturity. Without greater size and a full-blown set of antlers, they do not have the armoury or strength to challenge for females during the annual rut.

Of this line up, Purdy knows the third in line well. This adolescent stag is consistently the boldest, most fearless and most aggressive amongst his peers. Time will tell if this attitude moulds into a champion stag.

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Graeme Purdy, 'FOUR STAGS', Archival C-Type print with protective face mount, 152.4 x 92cm (print size) 160cm x 100cm (approx framed size)

SILVERBACK STARE

Mountain Gorilla Silverbacks are bigger than you think. After days of visiting different groups, Purdy realised that the Silverback's gaze and attention is not random. They recognise the faces of the local trackers who have visited the group regularly. When they saw them they stared, some for a few seconds, others for longer. Purdy states that you are left in awe after seeing mountain Gorillas. This Silverback was the alpha male of a large group. At 42 years old he was in his prime and commanded the respect of his group.

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Graeme Purdy,
'SILVERBACK STARE',
Archival C-Type print with protective face mount
152.4 x 89.5cm (print size)
100 x 160cm (approx framed size)

THOUGHTFUL

In the book 'Eight Feet', Graeme states, "Some animal behaviour seems random at best, finding the logic in their actions an impossibility. With Gorillas you can see them thinking, they are processing what is going on around them in a way that is more tangible to us than when observing other animals".

When Graeme took this shot he felt aware that everything about this female Gorilla was thoughtful and precise. She had found a comfortable spot under some bushes and was picking her breakfast delicately leaf-by-leaf as if it were a fine dining experience, exercising much more care and patience than a human would.

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Graeme Purdy, 'THOUGHTFUL',
Archival C-Type print with protective face mount
152.4 x 141cm (print size) 160 x 150cm (approx print size)

Matriarch

Working with elephants requires the utmost care. They are very intelligent and unlike many animals, they have a clear body language that must be understood and respected. The Matriarch leads the herd in all respects: she navigates them to fresh grazing and water as well as setting the mood of the herd.

When this shot was taken, the Matriarch was relatively relaxed and accepted company for a while. Graeme was privileged to be able to share their space, and mingle amongst the herd as one of them.



Graeme Purdy, 'Matriarch', Archival C-Type print with protective face mount, 182.8 x 74cm (print size) 200 x 85 (approx print size)

TOGETHER WE STAND

Lions are social cats but this doesn't mean they are best friends all of the time. Like most families squabbling and discord are quite normal. Lions are also typically affectionate and might greet each other by rubbing cheeks (like a house cat would do), or depending on which lion is approaching, you may find that they greet one another with a 'leave me alone' snarl. This makes watching lions very interesting.

The internal affairs of a pride sometimes give the appearance of disunity, but an outsider approaches and the pride becomes one unbreakable family unit.

Just before Purdy took this shot there was some rough play taking place, with some cubs being bullied and chased. Graeme says in the book 'EIGHT FEET', "Then my camera appears and domestic affairs are put immediately to one side. Fighting cubs stand cheek to cheek, big cousin wakes up at the back and the bigger cub on the left comes over to check all is well.

When the chips are down a pride unites... 'Together we stand'".

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Graeme Purdy, 'TOGETHER WE STAND', Archival C-Type print with protective face mount, 152.4 x 93.4cm (print size) 160 x 100 (approx print size)

ALPHA

This fearless lioness had been one of Purdy's earliest subjects to shoot at close range. But on previous occasions she had taken his camera and left the tripod for her cubs to play with (images of this can be seen in the book).

A lot had been learnt and 6 months later, he had a chance to photograph her once more. Purdy was in no danger during this shot, but his camera was once again in jeopardy. When the lioness approached, Purdy wondered if he could hold his nerve? A good image required her to walk up to a distance of four feet from the camera, but at 2 or 3 feet she could swipe, bite or just take the camera. On this occasion, Purdy's timing was good and with heart in mouth, he bagged the image he had been waiting for.

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Graeme Purdy, 'ALPHA', Archival C-Type print with protective face mount,
152.4 x 109cm (print size) 160cm x 125cm (approx framed size)

ELUSIVE PRINCE

The Leopard is easily the most challenging big cat to photograph. This is due to the fact that Leopard territory is vast, they are notoriously well camouflaged, and as well as being largely nocturnal, they are also solitary and shy animals. Anyone who has spent hour upon hour in search of this rare beauty knows that you do not decide to see a Leopard - it decides to show itself to you.

This shot is of a young male who was staring out across the plain waiting for mum to return. He sat for just long enough to allow dawn to break and the sunlight to kiss his coat, then he slowly slipped into the shadows and was gone.

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Graeme Purdy, 'ELUSIVE PRINCE', Archival C-Type print with protective face mount, 152.4 x 104cm (framed size) 160cm x 125cm (approx (framed size))

UNDER PROTECTION

Cheetahs are thought to be the first domesticated cats, and have been well documented sitting by Pharaohs and Kings through the ages. Nowadays they are a vulnerable species, and survival rates for cubs can be as low as 10% due to the fact that they are poor climbers and not fast enough to outrun predators such as other big cats and Hyenas.

These 2 cats will need all the courage they can muster. Cub survival depends on concealment and the mothers bravery for the first 6 months of its life. This little cub was bold and particularly mobile for her age.

We are all rooting for her and hope this duo make it through.

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Graeme Purdy,
'UNDER PROTECTION',
Archival C-Type print with protective face mount
152.4 x 110.5cm (print size)
160cm x 125cm (approx framed size)



ICE BEAR

“Photographs don’t tell you it’s -25. If not moving and holding my metal camera then it’s not long at all before I’m incapacitated by cold”.

Even covered in their modern cold weather gear the conditions under which Purdy captured this image were brutal. In comparison this huge male polar bear will overheat if the temperature gets close to zero. He is at one with the elements and accustomed to a silent vast tundra that appears too bleak for anything to survive.

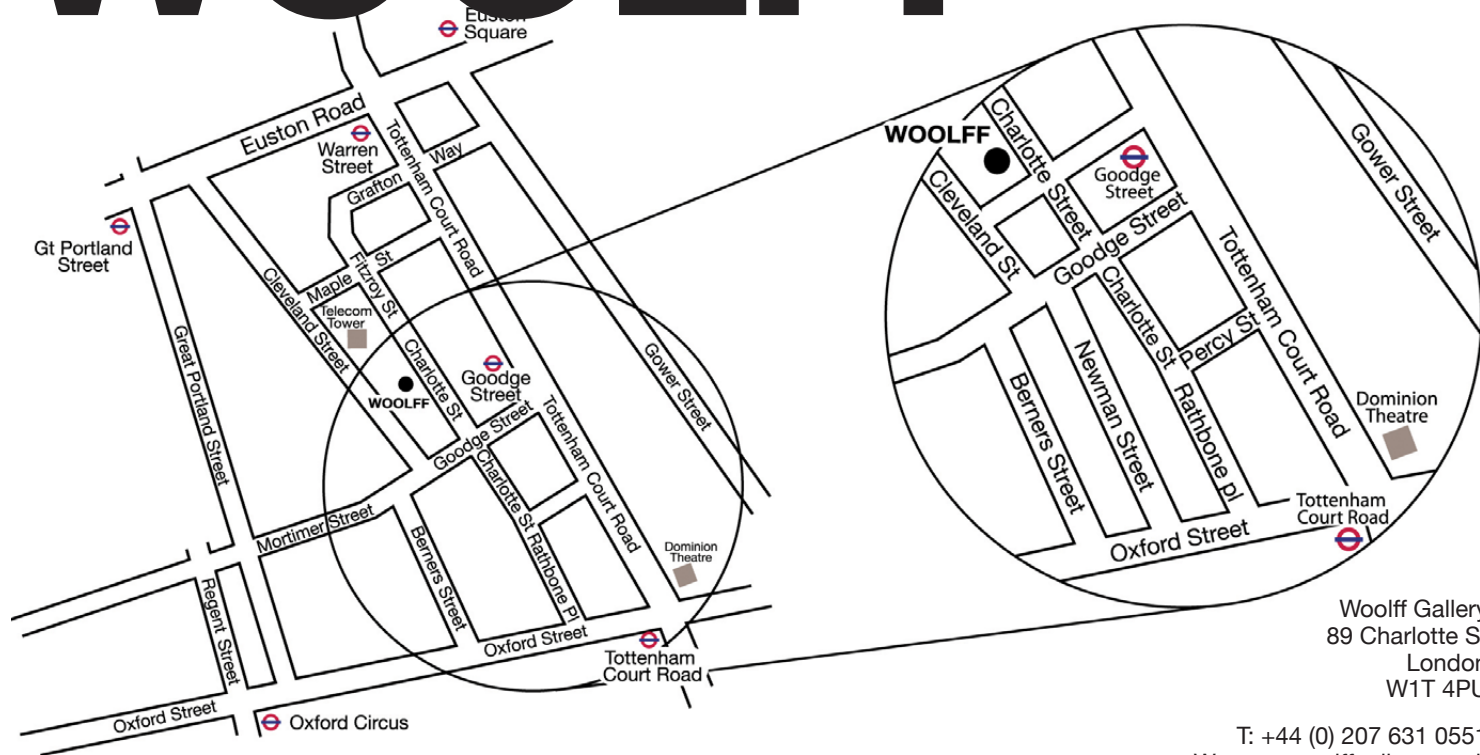
“Just because we get close to them doesn’t mean we are living in the same worlds, I’m a fleeting visitor and I look at this image as he looks right back into my eyes, am I the first “people” he has ever seen? This area is so remote it’s quite possible”. GRAEME PURDY

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Graeme Purdy, 'ICE BEAR', Archival C-Type print with protective face mount, 160cm x 125cm (framed)

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