

EXOTIC WILDLIFE – Read the Story

Royal Family (Cheetahs in the Serengeti)



One of the most memorable experiences from my trip to Africa was observing a family of Cheetahs up close. This particular mother Cheetah, the "Queen of the Serengeti" as I came to call her, was quite extraordinary. She had successfully raised 4 cubs to near adulthood, or teenage as a human correlation, and they were all still healthy and alive.

Cheetahs are the fastest land animals on earth and arguably, the most successful hunters in their habitat. However, they are slight of build compared to the other top predators they live among and they are also solitary, so the mothers raise their young alone. Because of this a large percentage of Cheetah kills are stolen from them by Lions, Hyenas, Wild Dogs, Jackals and Vultures which form packs, prides or flocks that easily overwhelm a solitary Cheetah. The much larger Leopards also steal Cheetah kills as do Eagles. Cheetahs, being the skilled hunters that they are, end up feeding the masses as they themselves go hungry. They have to be supreme hunters in order to survive seeing as they only benefit from a percentage of their own efforts.

As if life was not difficult enough for Cheetahs already, due to these circumstances they must hunt almost continuously. To make matters worse, the cubs are often killed by larger predators or they starve because the mothers' kills are so often stolen. On the average one cub from a litter will survive to this age, sometimes two, often none. For this mother to have successfully raised these 4 cubs to this age was indeed extraordinary and spoke of her capabilities. For us to have been able to see her and her family was a rare treat and a thrill beyond words. She gave us a special gift.

Until this point in our trip we had only seen a Cheetah far off, a speck in the grass. We were becoming discouraged that we may not even see one close enough to get a photo. Then our guide got word that a Cheetah had been spotted not far from where we were. We sped to the spot and got in line behind other jeeps that had arrived before us. We sat for a few moments seeing nothing. Then slowly, a Cheetah rose up out of a ravine facing in our direction. She paused then began to walk towards us. Our pulse quickened and the excitement built as one by one, four more Cheetahs followed her out of the ravine!!!! They continue to walk towards us until mom sits down on an extinct termite mound and the cubs join her. They are perhaps 40 yards from us at this time and I cannot express the joy and excitement that this encounter gave to us.

The cubs were finally all assembled, looking this way and that, while mom with four teenagers to feed was focused on the next hunt. I was focused on her and seeing that she could never stop thinking about the next meal. I see her searching the plain then

suddenly she begins to stalk. She has seen something in the vast expanse of the Serengeti beyond us. She moves, stealthy, and stalks right in front of us, never looking our way, head low, eye on the prize and the cubs follow. They pass right in front of us and cross the road. Suddenly she stops and sits down. It's over. Whatever she saw (which we never did see) was gone. She will have to try again.

Perhaps without an envoy of jeeps filled with human admirers she will be more successful next time. But then there are the lions, hyenas, jackals...

This huntress who feeds the masses is Queen of the Serengeti to be sure.

Sycamore

I Got Your Back, Lion Cubs



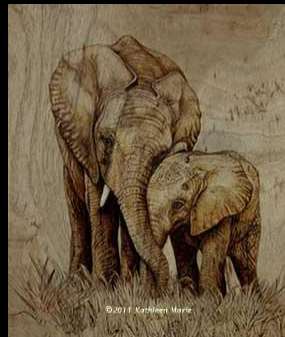
We did see a lot of lions in Tanzania but this one particular encounter was special. Somehow our guides spotted these two little cubs hidden in the tall grass under a tree. The pride had hidden them there while they went out to hunt.

They were hard to see at first, well camouflaged, but when they saw us watching them it was clear they became uncomfortable. One looked up the tree as if thinking about climbing up as the other one kept an eye on us.

We left them alone and not far down the road found the pride lazing around with full bellies. It seems they had a successful hunt. I mounted this piece on a walnut log because it just fit right into the image.

Original on Pecan

Terms of Endearment – Elephants



Most people are aware of the high intelligence and sensitivity that elephants possess. They live in devoted matriarchal family groups and the older juveniles help care for their younger relatives. I was struck by the affection that this pair of youngsters shared when the baby wanted some reassurance from its older sister. It was truly and endearing sight to behold.

Original on Pecan

Passion (Lion & Lioness)



Things are not always as they seem at first glance. What appears to be a serious disagreement between a pair of lions is actually a moment of intense intimacy. How to portray this passionate embrace artistically while avoiding a possibly offensive representation was my first challenge. In keeping with the intensity of the subjects I chose to render them in supreme detail. There is nothing suggestive here, however, a moment clearly put down can easily be misread. Life is like that sometimes. Look in the eyes to get the true story.



Essence of a Tiger

I was inspired to do just the essential qualities of the cat, his stripes, eyes, nose and mouth, leaving the rest to be indicated by the wood itself and what is not there, the imagination of the viewer sees. I'm so pleased with the results that I intend to represent more of the great cats in this way.

Hidden in Plain Sight – Zebras



There is nothing ordinary about Zebras, and why are they so boldly marked when other animals have adapted to blend in?

This image explains it. Zebras are strongly herd animals and in a group their stripes create a visual chaos...camouflage. This helps protect the young from predators.

Having observed Zebras in the wild, I noticed they prefer to stand their ground when faced with a predator. If they run they become vulnerable and individuals are more easily selected out. The herd protects the young, old and weak.

I've seen Zebras stomp, huff and wag their ears to distract the predators' attention in order to accentuate the visual confusion and draw attention away from where the babies are. If they keep the babies from being spotted, the predator will likely move on unless desperately hungry. Adult zebras are good runners and notorious kickers and many a lion has met its end from a well-placed kick to the jaw. Broken jaw equals starvation.

In this image I sought to reveal the personality of the zebra as well as the secrets of its design. The one in the back with her ears sideways had a deep, gaping wound on her inner thigh from a recent attack and she was in no kind of good mood.