

Dan Cox
{Wildlife On}
The Creative Edge

Dan Cox's camera has taken him to all seven continents to capture on film a vast array of animals, from penguins to zebras to polar bears to sloths. The results have been featured in galleries internationally, graced the pages of magazines including *National Geographic*, *Audubon*, *National Wildlife*, *Sierra*, *Wildlife Conservation* and *Terre Sauvage*, and illustrated seven books. But rather than sit back and rest on his laurels—and his massive stock photography library, Natural Exposures—Cox continually looks for the creative and technical edge. This search has led the Montana-based photographer into the digital world. While he continues to capture the bulk of his work on traditional film, he sees pixels in his future.

Outdoor Photographer: *How did you initially get into wildlife photography?*

Dan Cox: I grew up on a farm in a little town called Twig, Minnesota, a blink on the highway heading north into canoe country. I had a father who was a hunter and a gatherer, so I spent a lot of time in the outdoors hunting and fishing as a kid. My dad also did photography fairly seriously. So all these things together put me on this path to being a wildlife photographer.

Outdoor Photographer: *Obviously, all wildlife photographers find and photograph wildlife. How do you work to make your images distinctive? What do you seek in your photography?*

Cox: First and foremost is a subject in beautiful light. But in reality, that doesn't always happen. With wildlife photography, you're documenting things, and so many cool things in an animal's life happen in adverse lighting conditions. A good documentary photographer stays with a situation even in bad light. However, when you're fortunate enough to have things take place when you're getting quality light, it's magic.

Outdoor Photographer: *How do you deal with photographing an animal in a low-light situation?*

Cox: With faster lenses and a reasonably fast film. I can easily push Provia 100 to 200 or 400, if need be. It's a very versatile film. Velvia is a beautiful film, and I use it for landscapes, but for a natural-history photograph, I find the col-



ors too gaudy. I've had too many situations where the brown coat of an animal turns too red with Velvia.

Outdoor Photographer: *What equipment are you bringing with you into the field?*

Cox: I use a Nikon F5 and an F100. In terms of lenses, I'm shooting with everything from an 18mm to a 500mm f/4 Nikkor lens. I've been using the D1 from Nikon for the last year when shooting digitally and am looking forward to working with the new D1x. One of the benefits of working with Nikon digital is that I can use my conventional lenses and not invest in an entirely new lens system. The downside with digital cameras is that they don't have the frame rates that wildlife photographers

need. You can only shoot three frames a second digitally as opposed to a Nikon F5, which can give you eight frames a second. You really need that for shooting action.

Outdoor Photographer: *Why the interest in digital?*

Cox: For one thing, the amount of money you save in film is tremendous. Stock shooters produce so much film through the camera. When I'm shooting digital, I can shoot a lot of photos, edit in the camera and keep just a few good images. There are also the environmental benefits of not having to work with chemicals used for film processing.

If I'm out on the road and have a hotel room or a camper, I can easily take my laptop and work on images I



Devotion to wildlife photography isn't shared by everyone. It often involves hours spent in cold and uncomfortable settings waiting patiently and silently for animals to show up. Landscape photographers can rely on a mountain being in the same place all day long. Owls, frogs and other critters keep their own schedules, and Dan Cox has a rare talent for finding them to get the perfect photo. His use of light and subject habitat makes for distinctive wildlife compositions.

frogs photographed with the D1 that are mind-boggling. I was amazed at the quality from the D1 on the print end of it.

I personally think that digital photography is there in terms of quality. I don't think there's any problem from what I've seen in reproducing images, especially magazine-size images, with digital. I think the biggest roadblocks are getting editors and clients to accept it and figuring out a system that's beneficial to everybody. I really believe the technology is there; it's just that not everybody is up to speed on it yet. I'd say that 90 percent of photographers out there who are doing commercial work are going to be completely working with digital in the not-too-distant future. It has so much potential for making life easier.

shoot digitally on location. When I'm in more remote locations with no power except for what you bring in on your back—for instance, my last big trip was to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska—and you're completely out of touch with any sort of electronic capabilities, digital falls down at this point. But I travel a lot to national parks and go back to a fairly civilized location where there's access to power.

Outdoor Photographer: What wildlife have you photographed digitally?

Cox: I've used the digital camera to photograph a variety of subjects in many situations from polar bears in Hudson Bay, Manitoba, to elephant seals in California. I recently did a captive shoot with frogs from South America. There are certain animals such as these frogs that are virtually impossible to shoot in the wild. We had 20x30-inch prints done of the