



[Shooting Into The Sun]

The Faces

The work I do isn't laden with monetary rewards. It's the lifestyle that drives my interest as well as a desire to bring beautiful images to people in hopes of gaining their support for the very few wild areas we have left in this world.

Over the years, I've honed my craft, particularly my lighting skills, and I'm constantly working to create captivating wildlife images. Capturing the attention of the busy public isn't easy to do, so my skills in picture-making help me

in my attempt to direct awareness toward the amazing creatures with which we share space.

Shafts of light beaming through holes in stormy clouds, a fiery red ball hanging just above the horizon, and dew glistening at sunrise in a rocky mountain meadow become a backdrop to my subjects. Light at the heart of all of these images helps me get my point across.

If communicating the importance of wildlife awareness fails, then my work as a journalist is even more significant,

as it simply becomes a way to document the incredible animals and a wilderness that once was. If there are pictures, it will not be forgotten.

Backlight, Sidelight, Rim Light

Shooting a subject with backlight or sidelight is one of the most effective ways to create the feeling of depth in still images. Shadows, halos and rim lights all help create the feeling of being able to reach out and touch your subject. Light like this is captured in the early-morning hours or late afternoon.



Of Light

Flat Light

I try not to shoot with the sun at my back. If I have to, elements like snow help light glisten and reflect off of subjects. This can add a sense of depth to an otherwise flat image. An advantage of shooting with the sun behind me is that the power of the light allows for a fast shutter speed so I can stop action.

Gold Light

Gold light is the quality of light that occurs as the sun nears the horizon. Often referred to as "golden hour," this

time of day happens just before sunset and right after sunrise. It's the best time for seeing wildlife and is when the most beautiful light shines. You'll see long, dark shadows mirroring your subjects and a warm glow enveloping your scene.

If I choose to use film, I use a warming filter on my lens to enhance this golden effect. When shooting digitally, I often select a white-balance setting that replicates this quality. Be careful not to use a filter or white balance that's too warm; overdoing it can render an untrue color cast in your image.

ABOVE, LEFT: The setting Arctic sun backlit these two polar bears. Wearing sunglasses in a shooting situation like this protects the eyes from the potentially harmful damage of direct sun.

ABOVE: Shooting with the sun at his back, Daniel J. Cox captured eagles in motion with a high shutter speed.



[Low Light/Gold Light]

ABOVE: *Nearing sundown, an Arctic fox trots across the snow. With the sun low on the horizon, a high ISO was needed to stop action. Using a digital camera allows for a variety of quick setting changes in various lighting situations.*

OPPOSITE PAGE, LEFT AND RIGHT: *By using fill-flash, Cox captured this female great horned owl with her chick while preventing the background from being overexposed; Low sunlight filled the polar bear's fur with a golden color that contrasted with the snow's purple hue.*

RIGHT: *Even if the sun doesn't shine, pictures still abound. Fog contributes beauty and a sense of mystery to this image of a grizzly bear.*

NEXT PAGE: *Rim light creates a sense of depth on the edge of this great gray owl.*

Fill-Flash

The worst time of the day to shoot is around noon, when the sun is highest in the sky. The sun has an unflattering blue cast and creates dark shadows under eyes. When I have to shoot in these conditions, my flash is a huge asset. Using fill-flash can even out scenes with extreme contrast as well as brighten up the shadow areas and turn an otherwise unusable image into a pleasing one.

When I use fill-flash, my personal rule of thumb is to reduce the output of my Nikon SB-800 flash by 0.7 (in bright, high-noon sun). If I can't get close enough to use a flash, I'll head back to camp, edit my digital images or catch up on writing. Typically, I don't return to the field until at least 3:30 p.m., depending on the season and location.

Dramatic Light

A shaft of light thrusting into an image is a powerful way to create drama in your photography. I search for these situations for the stunning effect that light of this nature creates. To generate

a more profound impact, I look for and incorporate either a dark foreground or background in my composition.

With so much contrast in a scene, proper exposure for an averaging camera meter can be tricky. I often resort to using my camera's spot meter and meter off the most brilliant middle tone in the scene, which renders a more balanced exposure. Some areas may go nearly black, but that may be an ingredient that adds to the drama of the image.

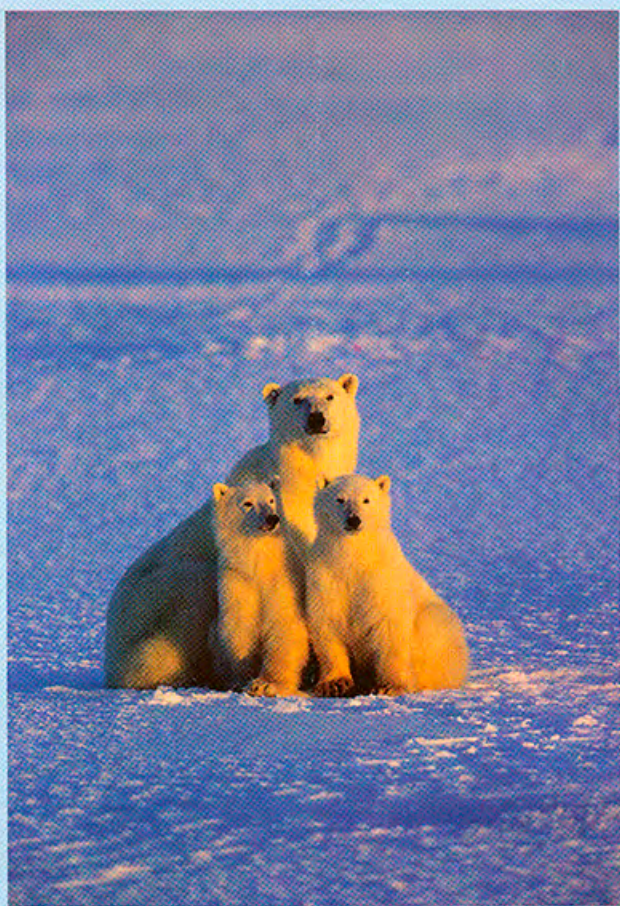
Shooting Into The Sun

Shooting directly into the sun can be dangerous. I carry a very dark pair of sunglasses with me to protect my eyes. When shooting into the sun, even with dark glasses, I never shoot unless the sun is nearly on the horizon.

I often use a telephoto lens in these situations since the compression of the lens helps create the larger-than-life feel of that magical orb. When metering in these conditions, I'll take a manual reading 45 degrees to the left or right of the sun, recompose and shoot. I can't stress



[Fill-Flash]



[Low Light/Gold Light]



[Fog]



[Backlight/Rim Light]

enough the importance of using extremely dark glasses in this setting. If you're not careful, you risk the chance of burning your retina—no image is worth that risk.

Lens flare is something I always try to avoid. Zoom lenses tend to enhance flare. Most of my images shot into the sun are taken with fixed-focal-length lenses, which are less problematic in this situation.

You usually can see lens flare in your viewfinder, so if it bothers you at the time you're shooting, rest assured you'll like it even less when you see the print. A large lens shade is an effective tool for blocking the sun. When that isn't enough, use your hand as a shield or compose your shot with an object, like a tree, in the path of the offending light.

Low Light

Low-light situations require me to shoot at a higher ISO so I can stop action. I'm happy to use a digital camera, as it allows me to change my ISO without having to change films. This is especially useful when I'm shooting all day and into the twilight hours.

Fog And Snow

Dean Conger, a kind and considerate illustrations editor at *National Geographic*, suggested to me back in 1983 to remember that "the sun doesn't always shine." I've taken that advice seriously. Some of my most memorable images don't have direct lighting at all. Weather such as fog, rain or driving snow can make an image more interesting than others shot on a bright, sunny day. Some of my favorite shooting conditions are during inclement weather.

When shooting in fog, depending on how thick it is and if the scene includes dark colors like trees, I'll sometimes overexpose by $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{2}{3}$ of a stop.

In snowy conditions, especially on cloudy days, I'll always meter manually using my camera's spot- or center-weighted meter and point it at a clean white patch of snow. I then adjust the meter to read 1.7 stops over the exposure of the camera's meter. One thing to remember is that late-evening light on a snowy field or in the Arctic tundra actually can make snow look gray. Overexposing will compensate for this. **OR**

To see more of **Daniel J. Cox's** photography, visit his Website at www.naturalexposures.com.

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