

THE WILD FOCUS METHOD

REDEFINING WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY MINDSET

This Wild Focus Method is a practical method designed to transform your wildlife photography experience by cultivating mindfulness.

The objective is to guide photographers through a step-by-step process, creating a mental blueprint for heightened awareness during shoots. This method empowers individuals to capture not just images but the *essence* of the wild.

To some people photography already *is* a mindfulness practice. A place to escape the busy schedules and the constant buzz of the world. But we can take it still a step further and add in some thoughtful practices that make it an even more meaningful and thorough experience.

This may sound a bit complicated at first, or too time-consuming in the context of the brief moments that we experience during wildlife photography. But I promise you, that if you train your mind and your practices regularly, this won't take any critical moments away – on the contrary – it'll enhance your experiences and elevate your photos.

How It Works in a Nutshell: The 4-Step Plan to Mindful Wildlife Photography

1. **Mindful Preparation:** Set the stage by clearing mental clutter before embarking on a shoot.
2. **Visual Anchoring:** Establish a focal point in your mind, aligning it with the natural world.
3. **Zone of Presence:** Create a mental boundary, immersing yourself fully in the present moment.
4. **Captured Essence:** Transcend the technical aspects; focus on capturing the soul of wildlife.

Example Of How It Can Be Used In Daily Life:

Picture yourself in a serene meadow attempting to photograph a butterfly. With the Wild Focus Method, start by clearing your mind of distractions. Visualize the butterfly as your focal point, creating a mental boundary around it. As you take the photo, your focus shifts from the technical details to capturing the essence of the delicate creature. And all this can be accomplished only in a few seconds' time.

What It Helps You Avoid:

The Wild Focus Method prevents the common pitfall of getting lost in the pure technicalities, missing the opportunity to create evocative and meaningful wildlife photographs. It guards against the frustration of a beautiful moment lost in the chaos of the mind.

How To Apply It:

- **Application:** Implement the method before, during, and after each wildlife photography session.
- **Benefit:** Elevated mindfulness, distinct and emotionally resonant wildlife captures.
- **Transformation:** Shift from a mechanically capturing images mindset to an artistically immersive and mindful approach, creating wildlife photographs that tell a story and resonate emotions.

Apply this blueprint method into your wildlife photography and I guarantee you will notice a shift in your perspective to a more mindful approach and experience – and a shift to better photography that transmits *emotion*, in addition to those beautiful shots. The shift may not be immediate, as learning new things always takes time. But if you are patient and implement this regularly, you will see the shift to better photos.

Now, let's get into business and delve deeper into the Wild Focus Method.

SHIFT FROM MECHANICAL PHOTOGRAPHY TO MINDFUL CAPTURING

Photography transcends mechanics; the Wild Focus Method unfolds a mindful narrative, transforming your lens into a tool that resonates emotion, capturing the essence of wildlife beyond the technicalities.

This shift isn't just about adjusting camera settings; it's a holistic transformation in your approach. **It's the realization that a great photograph is more than just proper exposure — it's about the connection forged with your subject.**

Imagine standing in a forest, camera in hand, faced with a fleeting moment. A mechanical approach might focus solely on the settings, but a mindful shift prompts you to feel the breeze, hear the rustle of leaves, see and anticipate the movement, and truly engage with the environment and your subject.

Frustration often stems from missed opportunities and the pressure to adhere strictly to technical guidelines. However, in acknowledging this frustration, you open the door to a more intentional and fulfilling photography experience. You will probably also notice that you enjoy it more.

Of course, if you still want to be on the “safe side”, you can first get the “traditional” shots focusing mainly on the technicalities and getting the scene. So you will not miss the window of opportunity that might be short.

But after that, in shifting to mindful capturing, it's about recognizing that each photograph is a unique story waiting to be told. Your lens becomes a bridge to the world you're capturing, inviting viewers into the intimate narratives of wildlife.

The Wild Focus Method emphasizes the significance of a mindful approach to photography. It's a journey of evolution, inviting you to see beyond the lens and the viewfinder, and immerse yourself in the art of storytelling through your camera.

Capturing wildlife isn't just a mechanical process — it's an emotional journey. This shift encourages you to immerse yourself in the moment, fostering a connection with your subjects that transcends technical mastery.

Consider the frustration of a missed shot. In this mindful shift, frustration becomes an opportunity — a catalyst for growth. It's an acknowledgment that there's more to photography than the “perfect shot”; it's about the experience, the emotion, and the connection.

The myth that technical proficiency alone defines success is debunked.

While technical skills are crucial, this section asserts that true success lies in the fusion of technical prowess and emotional engagement.

It's a harmonious blend that results in photographs that resonate on a deeper level.

This shift isn't a departure from technicalities; it's an enhancement. It's the understanding that your camera is not just a tool but a companion on a journey of discovery. Embrace this shift, and your photography becomes a testament to the beauty and vulnerability of the wild.

Embrace this transformative journey — from mechanical to mindful photography — where your lens becomes a conduit to the soul of wildlife, capturing stories rather than just images.



Two brown bears (*Ursus Arctos*) having a short fight in the swamp in northern Finland.

CONNECTING EMOTIONALLY WITH THE WILD

Embrace the emotional power of wildlife photography.

In the realm of wildlife photography, technical precision alone falls short; true mastery involves embracing the emotional spectrum of your wild subjects.

This isn't about capturing a mere image; it's about evoking emotions. Imagine of a lion in the savannah — not just a visual, but an emotional encounter that resonates with the raw power and vulnerability of the wild.

The desire for deeper connections with wildlife is innate. This section taps into that longing, encouraging you to move beyond the role of an observer to becoming a participant in the stories unfolding in the animal kingdom.

Challenging the myth that technical mastery is the sole conduit for conveying emotion, we delve into the idea that emotion is equally, if not more, rooted in the intent and emotional investment of the photographer.

Connecting emotionally with the wild isn't a departure from technical excellence; it's a harmonious union. Technical skills become tools to amplify the emotional impact, translating the untamed beauty of nature into a language that transcends pixels.

Wildlife photography isn't a detached pursuit; it's a union with emotion. It's the realization that every creature, from the majestic elephant to the smallest insect, carries a story — an emotion waiting to be captured.

Recognizing the desire for deeper connections goes beyond the lens — **it's a mindset.** It's about immersing yourself in the world of your subjects, understanding their behaviors, and capturing the moments that resonate emotionally. Cultivating this approach all the time, not just when you have your camera in hand, gives you more advantage and more inner spectrum and vision.

The myth of relying solely on technical mastery to convey emotion is debunked. While technical skills are essential, the emotional journey is equally vital. It's about channeling your passion into every shot, making your audience feel the heartbeat of the wild.

The emotional power of wildlife photography lies in authenticity. It's about capturing the unfiltered moments, the nuances of expressions, and the untamed essence of the wild. This emotional resonance elevates your photography from documentation to storytelling.

Connecting emotionally is stepping into the wild not just as an observer but as a participant, feeling the heartbeat of nature in your soul and translating it into a visual narrative that resonates deeply.

The Key Take-Away:

As you navigate the emotional landscape of wildlife photography, remember that the power of your images lies not just in technical finesse but in the emotional connection forged between the photographer and the untamed subjects of the wild.



A male and female brown bear (*Ursus Arctos*) meet in a taiga forest during the mating season in June, 2023, northern Finland.

BREAKING FREE FROM PHOTOGRAPHY MYTHS

Uncover and address common misconceptions in wildlife photography.

In the vast wilderness of wildlife photography, breaking free from myths is the key to unlocking your full creative potential.

Let's dismantle the notion that success is defined by the sophistication of your gear. **It's not about the camera; it's about the eye behind it, *how* it shows the scenes that unfold in front of it.**

Understand the frustration stemming from misguided beliefs — that sinking feeling when you believe more gear equates to better photos. We'll explore the concept that true success lies in mastering your craft, not accumulating equipment.

Dispelling the myth that quantity beats quality, we delve into the misconception that a barrage of shots guarantees a masterpiece. Quality trumps quantity: each click should tell a story, not just fill a memory card.

In a world where photography is often equated with gear, it's time to redefine success. **It's not the size of your lens but the depth of your connection with the subject that makes a photograph truly remarkable.**

Uncovering common misconceptions is about liberating yourself from the shackles of perceived norms. **It's realizing that your creativity is not confined by the specifications of your equipment but fueled by your unique perspective.**

The frustration stemming from misguided beliefs is universal. Picture the moment you felt compelled to buy that expensive lens, thinking it would magically transform your photography. Addressing this frustration involves shifting focus from gear-centric aspirations to skill development.

Never cease to learn new things! That is one of the best advices I can give to improve your photography. When I learned to implement a more mindful approach to wildlife photography, it liberated me to actually focus on my work, on my images, instead of my gear and to longing for more and better gear.

The myth that success hinges on gear is a trap many fall into. I challenge this by emphasizing that your ability to tell a compelling visual story is the true measure of success, irrespective of the camera brand or lens model you use.

Quantity does not guarantee quality. I debunk the idea that capturing a multitude of shots drastically improves your chances of getting the perfect one. Instead, I advocate for a *mindful* approach — each click should be intentional, capturing a unique facet of the wild.

You *can* lower your camera and look at your surroundings again, with your eyes and with your soul, with your whole presence. Not just through your viewfinder. You'll see things differently. And when you see differently, you can pass that on to your images.

In the world of wildlife photography, success is redefined as the culmination of your skills, your connection with the subject, and your ability to convey the untamed beauty of nature through a single, impactful image.

As we break free from the myths that shackle creativity, *remember that your journey in wildlife photography is a personal narrative*, not a gear checklist. Quality triumphs over quantity, and success is defined by the stories your photographs tell, not the price tag of your equipment.

Now, when we have set the framework of the Wild Focus Method, let's move on to the Action Steps which you can implement right away to get visible improvements to your photos and to your mindful focusing when you are in the field.



A Temminck's Pangolin (or the Temminck's Ground Pangolin) walking while foraging for ants and termites in Namibia. This pangolin was in rehabilitation and I had the opportunity to observe him while on his daily foraging.

While photographing wild animals, it's a big advantage if you can get low; to get to the eye-level. It brings the animals nearer to the persons who look at the images. It creates more intimate and deeper connection between you and your subject. And when people see your images, it makes the people feel like they would be right there, at the spot, looking at the animals themselves.

UNLOCKING FOCUS: MINDFUL PREPARATION

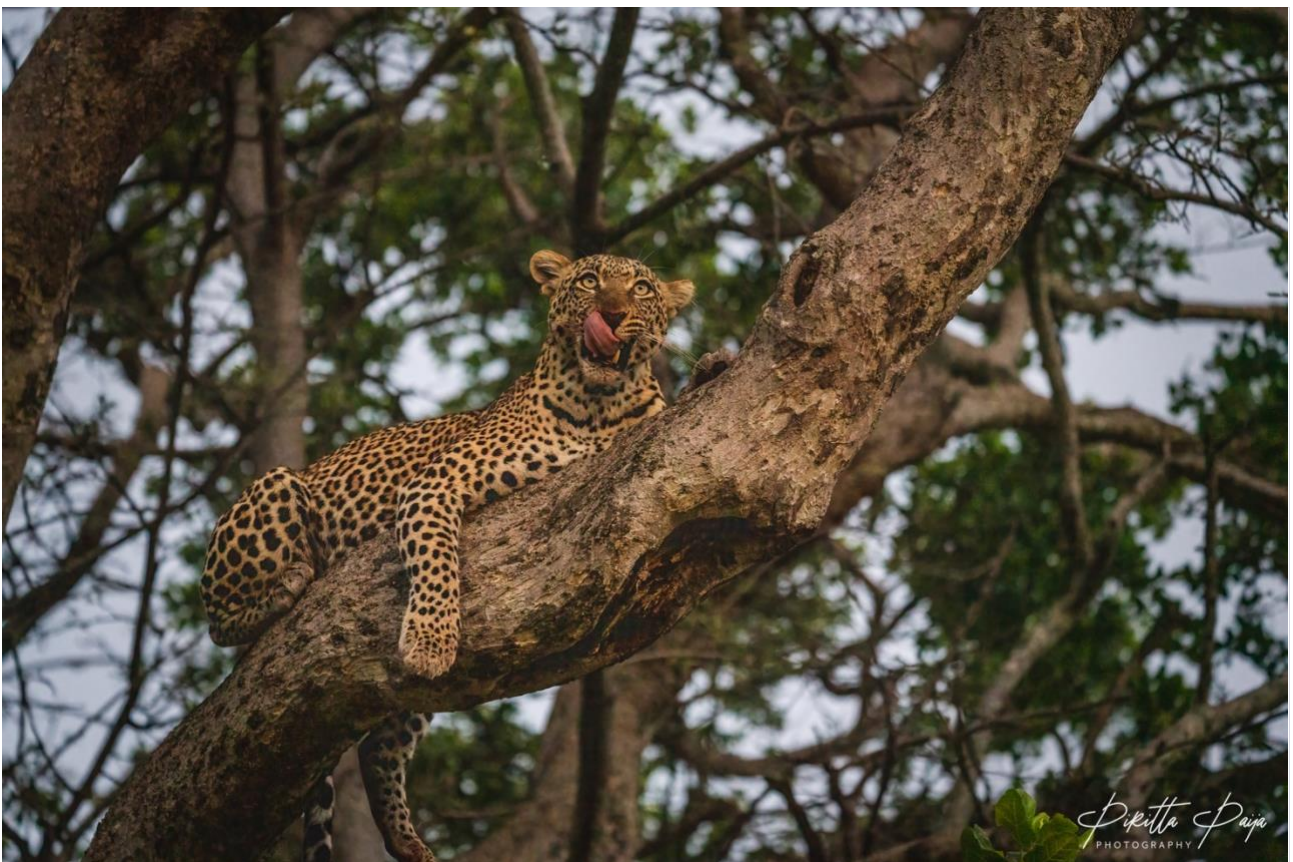
Prepare for a transformative wildlife photography session by setting the stage mindfully.

In the pursuit of extraordinary wildlife photographs, the key lies in the deliberate and mindful preparation before you even press the shutter.

To unlock your improved focus, imagine the difference between a distracted and a focused photographer. Eliminate distractions to elevate the quality of your wildlife photos.

Imagine you are on a serene meadow, at the scene of your next wildlife encounter. Before diving into the visual spectacle, take 5-10 minutes to clear your mental clutter. Visualize your goals for the session, and meticulously prepare your gear for the unique challenges the wild may present.

Through an illustrative example on the next page, I guide you step by step to clear your mind. Imagine the mental clarity achieved when you intentionally clear away the noise before a shoot, providing a clear canvas for the raw beauty of the wild to unfold.



A young leopard lounging on a tree branch in the Serengeti National Park in Tanzania.

A Guided Meditation: Serenity in the Meadow

Find a quiet space and settle into a comfortable position. Close your eyes and take a deep breath. Let the outside world fade away as you enter the realm of your imagination.

Arrival in the Meadow: *Imagine yourself standing at the edge of a serene meadow. Feel the softness of the grass beneath your feet and the gentle warmth of the sunlight on your skin. Take a moment to connect with the tranquility of this space.*

Clearing Mental Clutter: *As you stand in the meadow, visualize any mental clutter dispersing like soft petals carried away by a gentle breeze. Let go of any lingering thoughts or worries, allowing your mind to become as open and vast as the meadow itself.*

Setting Your Goals: *With the mental clutter gone, envision your goals for the wildlife photography session. Visualize the shots you aspire to capture in your mind — each one telling a unique story of the wild. Let these goals guide your intentions and focus as you move through the meadow.*

Take another deep breath. Now you can slowly open your eyes. And now, you can move to the next part of this mindful preparation.

Meticulous Gear Preparation: *Shift your attention to the gear at your side. In this tranquil setting, carefully prepare each piece. Feel the weight of your camera, the texture of the lenses, and the reliability of your equipment. As you meticulously prepare, sense a harmonious connection forming between you and your tools.*

Immersion in Nature's Symphony: *With mental clarity, goals set, and gear ready, take a moment to immerse yourself fully in your natural surroundings. If you want to, you can close your eyes again, but you can also keep them open, if it feels more natural to you. Listen to the rustle of leaves, the distant calls of birds, and the whispering breeze. Feel the interconnectedness between you and the wild. You are not separate, you are one.*

Closing the Mindfulness Moment: *As you slowly bring your awareness back to the present moment, carry this sense of serenity with you. Whenever the demands of daily life become overwhelming, you can return to this mental meadow for a few moments of clarity and peace.*

Take one more deep breath, open your eyes (if they were closed), and step back into the world, grounded and ready to approach each moment with renewed focus and calmness.

- You can download the accompanying audio meditation file from the Gumroad page from where you bought this book. It is included in your purchase.

Practical action steps are paramount. Embed the practice of mindful preparation in your next photography session, experiencing firsthand the impact it can have on the quality and depth of your wildlife captures. And the impact to your inner serenity and renewed focus.

In the realm of wildlife photography, mindful preparation is the compass that guides you toward extraordinary shots. It's not merely about adjusting camera settings but about creating an optimal mental space where the essence of the wild can be captured.

Distractions are the silent saboteurs of exceptional photography. By eliminating external and internal disturbances, you create a focused environment that allows you to truly connect with your subject and use your creativity to its fullest potential.

Visualize the meadow as your canvas. Before immersing yourself in the visual feast, clear the mental clutter that may cloud your creative vision. **Visualizing your goals directs your focus**, ensuring that every shot contributes to the narrative you wish to convey.

The preparation also extends to your gear, ensuring it's not a hindrance but an ally. Imagine the frustration of missing a fleeting moment because your equipment wasn't ready. Mindful preparation mitigates such instances, allowing you to be in sync with the unpredictable nature of wildlife.

Now, envision a scenario where, before each session, you dedicate a few minutes to clear mental clutter and align your objectives. Picture the impact on the clarity and intentionality of your shots — the difference between a photographer and a storyteller. Wouldn't those few minutes be worth it?

As you embark on the journey of mindful preparation, remember that each session is an opportunity to transcend the technicalities of photography.

By eliminating distractions and honing your focus, you create a space where the wild reveals itself in its unfiltered beauty. Make mindful preparation a ritual and witness the transformative power it brings to your wildlife photography.

VISUAL ANCHORING: FRAMING YOUR WILDLIFE VISION

In the realm of wildlife photography, establishing a visual anchor is the gateway to capturing the essence of the wild, aligning your focus with the natural environment.

Visual anchoring is about more than just framing a shot; it's a conscious act of connecting with your subject. Imagine yourself in the heart of nature, where each element is a potential muse. Before even lifting your camera, take a moment to appreciate the surroundings, allow your chosen focal point to emerge organically.

Visual anchoring enhances the potential of your shots, ensuring that each photograph communicates the story you want. It's not just about technical precision but about capturing the spirit of the moment. By aligning your subject with the natural environment, you create a narrative within the frame — a story that unfolds beyond the visual representation.

Let's consider an example to illustrate the power of visual anchoring.

Imagine you are in a lush forest, and you spot a majestic deer. Instead of hurriedly snapping a photo, take a short pause. Mentally frame the deer within the context of its habitat, considering the play of light, the surrounding foliage, and the subtle details that make the moment unique. Adjust your camera settings not just for technical correctness but to enhance the visual story you're about to tell.

You may only have a short moment to capture the beautiful deer, but with practice, you can go through this mental preparation and visual anchoring in an extremely short time and get the shot you visualized.

Applying visual anchoring in your photography outings transforms the way you approach each subject. It's a shift from mere documentation to intentional storytelling. As you implement this approach, you'll find that your shots become more than images; they become visual narratives that resonate with the essence of the wild in a whole other level.

In conclusion, visual anchoring is the key to unlocking the true potential of your wildlife photography. It's a mindful process that transcends the technicalities, inviting you to immerse yourself in the beauty of the wild.

As you venture into your next photography session, remember it's not just about what you see through the lens, but how you frame it within the rich tapestry of nature.

ZONE OF PRESENCE: IMMERSING YOURSELF IN THE MOMENT

To elevate your wildlife photography, create a mental boundary and immerse yourself fully in the *present*, unlocking a deeper connection with your subjects.

In the world of wildlife photography, the *Zone of Presence* is your passport to a profound connection with the natural world. **This isn't just about being physically present; it's about immersing your mind and spirit in the moment.**

Picture yourself again in the sunlit meadow, your camera in hand, ready to capture the essence of this wild scene. Before you press that shutter, create a mental boundary, allowing you to fully engage with your subject.

The Zone of Presence is not just a technique; it's a gateway to authenticity in your wildlife captures. It's about transcending the role of an observer and becoming an integral part of the environment. **As you immerse yourself fully in the present moment, you'll notice a shift in the energy of your photographs — each shot becomes a testament to the genuine connection you've established with your subjects in that precise moment in time and space.**

Now, let's consider again a practical example of applying the Zone of Presence.

During a wildlife shoot, consciously focus on your subject, excluding peripheral distractions. In this focused state, you become attuned to the nuances of your subject's behavior, the play of light, and the subtle changes in the environment. It's not just about taking pictures; it's about capturing moments that resonate with the authenticity of the wild.

Next, take this into action. In your next wildlife encounter, practice the Zone of Presence. **Before you start shooting, take a moment to ground yourself in the environment.** Allow your mind to quiet the noise of the world and let the essence of the wild seep into your consciousness. As you press that shutter, do it with intent, capturing not just an image but a moment frozen in time.

The Zone of Presence is the catalyst for elevating your wildlife photography from a mere visual record to a soulful expression. It's a part of the practice that goes beyond the technicalities, inviting you to embrace the raw beauty of the wild.

As you step into your next photography session, remember that it's not just about what you see; it's about *being fully present* in the untamed complexity of nature with all your senses and your soul. It's a physical, mental, and spiritual connection.



Giraffes on a misty morning in Kruger National Park, South Africa.

CAPTURED ESSENCE: BEYOND TECHNICALITIES

To truly capture the soul of wildlife, shift your focus from technical details only and embark on a journey to convey the essence and emotion of your subjects.

In wildlife photography, there exists a transformative approach that transcends the confines of technicalities. *The Captured Essence* method beckons photographers to step away from the overwhelming array of camera settings and instead, direct their attention to the heart of the wild. It's not just about capturing images; it's about conveying the raw and untamed emotions that dwell within the subjects.

Imagine a scenario where, instead of obsessing over your settings, you aim to convey the essence and emotion of your subject. **This isn't a rejection of technical knowledge; it's just a liberation from its shackles. You will have to know your techniques. And when you know the techniques, you can intentionally break them. To know the rules, is to break to rules.**

Your camera becomes a vessel through which you channel the spirit of the wild. The play of light on fur, the glint in the eye, the subtle movements — all become part of a narrative that goes beyond pixels and resolution.

The potential inherent in this shift is immense. As you venture into this realm, you unlock the ability to create evocative and storytelling wildlife photographs. Each shot becomes a brushstroke in a canvas of untold stories, where the subject is not just an object but a living, breathing character in the grand theater of nature. Your photographs cease to be mere records; they become windows into the soul of the wild which seamlessly transmits the wild to the viewer.

Let's delve into action now and next is again a practical rehearsal for you.

In your next photo session, apply the *Captured Essence* approach. As you frame your shot, let go of the compulsion to tweak *every* technical setting to the perfection. A good, balanced exposure is many times enough.

Instead, focus on the mood, the atmosphere, and the emotional resonance of the scene. Seek to capture not just the physical form of the wildlife but the essence — *the intangible*, fleeting quality that defines the very soul of the subject. Let your creativity and connection to the wild become first, and the perfect technicalities second.

The Captured Essence approach invites you to embrace the profound artistry of wildlife photography. It's a departure from the clinical precision of technical details only, encouraging you to see beyond the megapixels and the technically perfect shot.

As you navigate through the wild with your camera in hand, remember that the true magic lies not in the camera settings but in your ability to reveal the hidden stories and emotions that pulse through the heart of nature.

CLOSING THOUGHTS: EMBRACE THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF MINDFUL PHOTOGRAPHY

In the closing moments of our mindful wildlife photography journey, let's reflect on the profound shift from conventional to mindful approaches and welcome the transformative power it brings.

In wildlife photography, the conventional and traditional path often leads to a technical maze, where the pursuit of perfection can overshadow the creativity and the true essence of the wild.

The Wild Focus Method isn't just a mindfulness guide; it's a "call to arms", urging photographers to break free from the shackles of pure tradition. It's a reminder that **the transformative power lies not just in the equipment we wield but in the mindset we embrace.**

As we journeyed through the method and got to know the different approaches and practical steps, we witnessed the evolution from mechanical photography to mindful capturing. We acknowledged the frustration and missed opportunities that conventional approaches often bring, highlighting the importance of a shift in perspective.

We debunked the myth that success hinges solely on technical proficiency, laying the groundwork for a more holistic and emotionally resonant connection with the wild.

Now, standing at the threshold of transformation, I encourage you to fully embrace your newfound connection with nature. It's not merely about taking pictures; it's about weaving a narrative that transcends the boundaries of a photograph. It's a bold statement, but it's possible.

The wild is not a subject to be conquered; it's a partner in a continuous dance of light, shadow, and raw emotion.

Through this mindful approach, you're not just a photographer; you're a real storyteller (even though how *cliché* that sounds), a witness to the untold stories whispered by the wind through the leaves and the silent gaze of the wild.

And – you know how to bring its essence into your images.

As you embark on this transformative journey, this method extends an invitation — implement one action step daily for a week to embed the approach into your regular photography routine.

It's not a call for a radical change but a gentle nudge towards a more mindful and intentional photographic practice. Each action step becomes a brushstroke in the canvas of your evolution as a photographer, slowly but surely transforming the way you perceive and capture the immense beauty of the wild.

And make use of the Wild Focus Method Worksheet that accompanies this eBook. Sketch and/or note down your personal insights and actions. According to science, writing things down emphasizes their imprint into your mind.

Your notes can guide your journey and thinking while you're practicing this mindfulness approach. I encourage you to jot down all your insights and observations, they may be useful references for yourself in the future, too.

I also encourage you to make frequent use of the accompanying audio meditation. Especially, if you are not so familiar with mediation, it's very helpful in guiding your mind and focus away from distractions and helps you to concentrate more in the present moment.

As parting words, let this not be just another guide you read and then completely forget about. Let this be a catalyst for a paradigm shift in your approach to wildlife photography. At least give it a try. That is the only way to notice the changes. And you may be positively surprised.

Embrace the transformative power embedded in each chapter, each tip, and each acknowledgment of the emotional depth that nature holds. You can try each of the steps separately, or progress from one to the other and apply them all together. Do whatever suits you best.

With the help of this method, may you not only capture images but curate experiences and stories that resonate with the very soul of the wild!

I hope you'll have amazing, enjoyable, and transformative moments in the wild. And always remember to respect and protect the wild. It's the most precious legacy we can leave to the generations to come.

You can also join our "The Wild Focus" Telegram channel dedicated to mindful wildlife photography at: <https://t.me/thewildfocus> for shared discussions, experiences, and more techniques, tips and tricks to achieve a better balance for yourself and to your images.

Have many happy and mindful photography sessions!

Piritta Paija

Conservation & Wildlife Photographer

<https://pirittapaija.com>

Exclusive wildlife photography newsletter:

<https://pirittapaija.substack.com>

Small-group photo safaris:

<https://safari.expeditionconservation.org>

© All photos and texts are copyrighted by Piritta Paija. All rights reserved. 2024.