

Zooming

By Dennis M. De Mello

A STRONG IMAGE can influence people... to buy a car, to try a new brand of cereal, to care about saving wildlife. That's why the Bronx Zoo chose Cass (right) for its subway poster boy in 1988. The strong image of Cass persuaded many people to come to the zoo and to experience wildlife in New York City.

For the poster, I photographed Cass's full face, framed by the hallmark shocking mane of an African lion in his prime. In this image, Cass's regal face is partly hidden behind a fallen log, yet the viewer can tangibly feel the entire animal in all his power. The eye contact between viewer and subject makes this so.

How do you create a strong image? Well, it takes patience. And being tuned into an animal's habits. Patience means slowing down, waiting for the picture you have in your mind's eye to appear before the lens.

To make this photograph of Cass, I used a Nikkor 400 mm telephoto lens on my Nikon F3, to allow me to achieve a close-range, sharp image. Avoid shooting down on an animal. I always try to position myself at its level and engage the animal eye-to-eye.

When possible, I try to include two separated areas within a frame that draw the viewer's interest. That way you end up with interactive visual tension: The eye first looks at one area, then goes to the other, and back again.

It was the skin pattern (left) that caused me to focus on this Baringo giraffe's hindquarters. Beneath the pattern, you have a palpable sense of the texture of the animal's skin. In the background, the blurred form of another giraffe strengthens the photograph and draws the viewer's eye away from the foreground, showing the whole animal as well. This time I used a Nikkor 180 mm telephoto lens on my camera.











Zoo's Butterfly Zone delight visitors and provide opportunities to capture children absorbed in close encounters. For the wing closeups, I used a ring light with a 60 mm Nikkor macro lens, which focuses down to eight inches. The encircling ring casts even, soft light, ideal for wing patterns (far left, a redlace wing butterfly, overlapped by the wing of a paper kite). An Io moth's wing (bottom) has an eyespot—perhaps to fool an attacking bird. A gentle touch to a common Mormon caterpillar (below), sent the creature into defensive mode, yielding a striking pose for the photo.











SHOOTING THROUGH GLASS is difficult under the best of circumstances, then add water to the mix. To capture Gus the polar bear fishing in his pool at the Central Park Wildlife Center in Manhattan (far left) and Kathy the beluga whale (head, above; tail, left) at the New York Aquarium in Brooklyn, I staked out spots close to the glass with the least reflective glare. Then I held my Nikon F4 raised and ready, its 35-70 mm Nikkor zoom lens parallel to the glass. Knowing the action would happen quickly, I watched with the naked eye for the animals to appear in the windows. I had the camera set on continuous low motor drive to allow me to rapidly shoot one frame after another as the animals passed by.



TO CAPTURE THESE American alligators in their nest exhibit at the World of Reptiles (above), I positioned my Nikon F4 and 60 mm lens close to the glass to eliminate reflection. Detaching my flash—a Nikon SB-26—I held it to mimic the angle of the sun. To shoot through wires at a lesser adjutant stork (right), I waited until the bird was standing back from the wires. Then, I opened my Nikkor 180 mm telephoto to its widest aperture and focused, making sure the wires fell outside the depth of field. They vanished. After you master these techniques, turn your attention to composition: The repetition of one, two, three alligators, all looking in the same direction, intrigues the eye, as does the shape of this stork's wing stretched in a graceful curve to dry in the sun.



In Focus DENNIS M. DE MELLO

is the Wildlife Conservation Society's staff photographer. He records the births, hatchings, and everyday lives of animals at the Bronx Zoo; Central Park, Prospect Park, and Queens wildlife centers; New York Aquarium; and St. Catherine's Island Wildlife Survival Center, off the Georgia coast (left, at work on the island). His photographs taken over the past 21 years, and those of his three predecessors, are available through the photo library at the Bronx Zoo. For information, please contact Diane Shapiro, Photo Librarian, at: dnshapirojuno.com. The photo files date from 1895 to the present.

