

# A Theoretical Introduction to Wildlife Photography Genre

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ජායාරූප ශිල්පයේ ශානර අතර වඩාත් ප්‍රකට ශානරයක් ලෙස වන ජීවී ජායාරූපකරණය සැලැකේ. වන ජීවී ජායාරූපකරණ ඉතිහාසය වසර සියයකටත් ඔබ්බට පවතින නමුදු මෑතක් වනතුරු ම ඒ සඳහා නිශ්චිත අන්තර්ජාතික නිර්වචනයක් නො වී ය. ඒ හිඩැස පුරවාලමින් ලොව ප්‍රධාන පෙළේ ජායාරූපකරණ සංවිධාන රැසක් එක් ව අන්තර්ජාතික ව බලපැවැත්වෙන පරිදි පොදු නිර්වචනයකට යටත් ව වන ජීවී ජායාරූපකරණ ශානරය වඩාත් ස්ථාවර විෂය පරාසයක් ලෙස ස්ථාපනය කිරීම 2015 වසරේ දී සිදු විය. එකී නිර්වචනය සලකා බලමින්, පවත්නා අනෙකුත් මූලාශ්‍රයයෙහි තතු විමසමින් වන ජීවී ජායාරූපකරණ ශානරයේ නිශ්චිත හැඩය හඳුනාගැනීම මේ ලිපියේ මූලික අරමුණ යි.

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සංස්. පී. ඒ. අමීල මදුසංක, ජයමල් ද සිල්වා, දිල්ෂාන් මනෝජ් රාජපක්ෂ,  
වන්දන රුවන් කුමාර, එච්. ඒ. ගිනාන් මධුසංඛ, නන්දුලා පෙරේරා  
'ප්‍රභා' ශාස්ත්‍රීය සංග්‍රහය, සිවු වැනි කලාපය - 2014/2015  
මානවශාස්ත්‍ර පීඨය, කැලණිය විශ්වවිද්‍යාලය

## **Introduction**

Capturing nature and wildlife images is an exclusive subject area of photography. It consists with the collaboration knowledge of few subjects like Photography, Art, Technology, Wildlife and Environment. Presently nature and wildlife photography and filming has been established as a one of the leading genres of photography and as a recognised profession. Also it's been a trendy popular hobby among worldwide photographers (theartcareerproject.com, 2014).

There are many of photography competitions and publications regarding the nature and wildlife photography genre from local to international levels. Among them, “Wildlife Photographer of the Year” photography competition, which has been annually organised by the ‘Natural History Museum of London’ and ‘BBC wildlife’ is regarded as the most prestigious nature and wildlife photography competition in the world (Nicholls, 2014). In 2014 the contest has received nearly 42000 entries from 96 countries (nhm.ac.uk, 2014). It proves the popularity of the competition as well as the popularity of the wildlife photography subject around the world.

In Sri Lanka, the annual photography exhibition named as “Young Eye on Nature” is the longest running nature and wildlife photography event of the country. The exhibition has been organised by Young zoologists’ Association of Sri Lanka through the last 25 years with the participation of both amateur and professional Sri Lankan photographers (Rodrigo, 2013). The National Photographic Art Society (NPAS) has organised several photography competition for wildlife photography genre like “Nature Photographer - 2001” and “Nature photographer 2002” (NPAS, 2001). However in the presence many annually holding wildlife photography exhibitions and competitions (like “Nethadara”

wildlife and nature photography exhibition organising by the University of Moratuwa) can be observed in the country. These facts are clear evidences to prove the progression of the popularity of wildlife photography in Sri Lanka as well.

Consequently today many people are engaged in the nature and wildlife photography field. They are pompously calling themselves as wildlife photographers while eagerly wandering through forests and natural environs to capture nature and wildlife to their cameras. However, it is not fair to call all of them as ‘wildlife photographers’ merely due to this reason. We cannot either annotate a photographer as a ‘wildlife photographer’ quite because they use telephoto lenses to capture the nature.

### **Defining Nature and Wildlife Photography**

According to the Collins dictionary, a wildlife photographer is, “someone that specialises in taking photographs of wild animals, especially in their natural habitats, and plants” (Collins English Dictionary, 2015). But this definition is also not a complete definition to outline the character of a wildlife photographer or to delineate the wildlife photography subject.

In 1st of June 2014, a new sound definition for nature and wildlife photography was established to fulfill this huge gap of defining the wildlife photography subject. The new definition was found through a collaborative effort of few international photographic associations (RPS, 2014);

*“ Nature photography is restricted to the use of the photographic process to depict all branches of natural history, except anthropology and archaeology, in such a fashion that a well-informed person will be able to identify the subject material and certify its honest presentation. The story telling value of a photograph must be weighed*

*more than the pictorial quality while maintaining high technical quality. Human elements shall not be present, except where those human elements are integral parts of the nature story such as nature subjects, like barn owls or storks, adapted to an environment modified by humans, or where those human elements are in situations depicting natural forces, like hurricanes or tidal waves. Scientific bands, scientific tags or radio collars on wild animals are permissible. Photographs of human created hybrid plants, cultivated plants, feral animals, domestic animals, or mounted specimens are ineligible, as is any form of manipulation that alters the truth of the photographic statement.*

*No techniques that add, relocate, replace, or remove pictorial elements except by cropping are permitted. Techniques that enhance the presentation of the photograph without changing the nature story or the pictorial content, or without altering the content of the original scene, are permitted including HDR, focus stacking and dodging / burning. Techniques that remove elements added by the camera, such as dust spots, digital noise, and film scratches, are allowed. Stitched images are not permitted. All allowed adjustments must appear natural. Color images can be converted to grayscale monochrome. Infrared images, either direct-captures or derivations, are not allowed.*

*Images used in Nature Photography competitions may be divided in two classes: Nature and Wildlife.*

*Images entered in Nature sections meeting the Nature Photography Definition above can have landscapes, geologic formations, weather phenomena, and extant organisms as the*

*primary subject matter. This includes images taken with the subjects in controlled conditions, such as zoos, game farms, botanical gardens, aquariums and any enclosure where the subjects are totally dependent on man for food.*

*Images entered in Wildlife sections meeting the Nature Photography Definition above are further defined as one or more extant zoological or botanical organisms free and unrestrained in a natural or adopted habitat. Landscapes, geologic formations, photographs of zoo or game farm animals or of any extant zoological or botanical species taken under controlled conditions are not eligible in Wildlife sections. Wildlife is not limited to animals, birds and insects. Marine subjects and botanical subjects (including fungi and algae) taken in the wild are suitable wildlife subjects, as are carcasses of extant species. Wildlife images may be entered in Nature sections of Exhibitions.”(RPS, 2014).*

## **Nature Photography and Wildlife Photography**

The new definition came in to effect from 1st of January 2015 and now it is being majorly use globally as the definition for nature and wildlife photography category. However, at present people seems to use the term “Nature photography” as a synonym for wildlife photography genre. It is not untrue in general conditions as Wildlife photography and Nature photography are considered as very compatible genres. Both have many similarities and only few differences. Hence the definition covered both wildlife and nature photography genres underneath a common category, it used the common term as “Nature Photography” to call for both nature and wildlife photography genres.

Earlier there were many commonly used definitions for “nature photography” (Ex: FIAP definition of Nature photography

before 2014). But these definitions did not consider wildlife photography as a specific or a related section. However this defect was corrected through this new nature photography definition by discussing nature and wildlife photography as two different sub categories.

*“Images used in Nature Photography competitions may be divided in two classes: Nature and Wildlife”.*

In this case the definition respectively outlines and clarifies about “nature photography” as a whole. The first requirement of any nature or wildlife photograph is that it must be a result of any photographic process. It means that images have to capture on a light sensitive surface like a film or a sensor.

It defines nature photography has to depict all branches of *natural history*, except anthropology (the study of humanity and modern humans) and archaeology (the study of past human life and culture). *Natural history* is a vast field consisting with many subjects like botany, zoology, geology, and ecology. In dictionary it defines as the study of animals and plants in wild state or the study of all natural phenomena (Collins English Dictionary, 2015). As an advocate for natural history, Dr. T.L.Fleischner has explained that natural history spans disciplines, it flows through science and painting and poetry and photography and literature and walks in the woods. So he believes that natural history as the search for, and description of, patterns in nature which can be either biotic or abiotic (T.L.Fleischner, 2002). This means nature photography doesn't restrict to plants and animals only. There are many more subjects found in the natural environment to consider.

The photograph has to be an honest presentation to get respected as a nature or wildlife photograph. This means the image must not be a result of any unethical effort and has to be suite

according to factors given by the definition. Meanwhile the story reveal through the image is considered more important than its pictorial quality in nature photography.

Any of human elements or any artifact should not be consisting in a nature photograph, but it is considerable when those human elements enhance the nature story. Photographs of artificially produced hybrid plants and cultivated plants are not considered as nature photographs. The common meaning of the word “Cultivate” is to grow and/or improve by labour and attention (Collins English Dictionary, 2015). The general biological meaning is that cultivated plants are those that exist because their ancestors were taken from the wild and grown under some form of controlled conditions that may have included careful breeding and selection. Therefore any plant that is the principal subject of a nature image should have germinated and grown without any human assistance and images (Killen, 2014).

Further the definition elucidate that images of ‘Domestic animals’ and ‘Feral animals’ are also ineligible. Domestic animal refers an animal, as the horse or cat that has been tamed and kept by humans as a work animal, food source or pet (Collins English Dictionary, 2015). Feral animals are animals that has escaped captivity or domestication and gone on to survive in wild without assistance (Marrow and Boulter, 2015). Introduced animals are not ineligible. Moreover nature photograph must be truthful, from capture to presentation. If an image does not appear “natural” to the viewers, it risks being disqualified as a nature photograph (Davis, 2009). Therefore nature photographers should always be cautious to select the exact shooting techniques and should know the limits of after processing as well.

The definition has adduced points to differentiate the two sub categories of Nature photography and wildlife photography.

Basically Nature photography is a vast field which is consisted with many elements while wildlife photography genre is positioned inside this vast arena with a very specific depth. For example some photography competitions of present day have both nature and wildlife sections. In such occasions it is permissible to enter any wildlife image in to the nature section but any nature image will not suit to enter for the wildlife section. This means the images that satisfy the nature criteria do not necessarily satisfy the wildlife criteria.

An interpretation issued by Australian Photographic Society has described factors that have to be considered to decide wildlife photograph from the nature photographs. Nature photography allows images of captive or restrained zoological plants and animals. Therefore images of animals or birds in zoological gardens, game farms or other similar enclosed areas are permitted in Nature. This includes situations in which the animal or bird is totally dependent on man for food. Images of plants in botanical gardens are permitted provided they are not hybrid plants or plants that they have been cultivated. Images of marine species in aquariums and similar enclosures are also permitted.

But in relation to the definition, Wildlife photography requires subjects *to be free and unrestrained in a natural or adopted habitat*.

Natural habitats are considered as any area where the subject of the image (any organism) lives or grows without being forced to do so by humans. Adopted habitat means the habitat does not have to be a place where animals or plants usually live or grow. It may be an unusual environment to which the particular animal or plant in the image has adapted of its own free will. Such adopted environments might relate with human influences. In such conditions human elements, artifacts might regard as the integral part of the nature story requirement. Also the subject (Organisms



shoeing in the image) must not be under any direct control of humans nor should it be dependent upon humans for food. Natural influences must determine its life, behavior and death (Killen, 2014).

In addition to the above base followings, there are some other major considerations when defining a wildlife image;

1. Environments such as aquariums, Zoological gardens, Game farms or other areas in which animals are enclosed or confined are not considered natural environments for the purpose of wildlife photography. (However images taken in these environments are acceptable as Nature images)

2. Animals in wildlife images should be free to come and go from the location in which they are photographed.

3. It is unacceptable to temporarily relocate or restrict the freedom of animals (including insects and reptiles) for the purpose of Wildlife photography.

4. National parks are considered natural environments because the plants and animals there are not considered to be in “controlled conditions”.

5. Areas such as regenerated forests or parks in urban areas are considered natural environments for the animals and plants that occur in them without human intervention.

6. It is unacceptable to relocate plants for the purpose of wildlife photography.

7. It is unacceptable to use techniques such as cooling or the application of chemicals to temporarily restrict the movement of animals (including reptiles and insects) for both nature and wildlife photography.

8. Images of animals of birds that show scientific bands, tags or radio collars are permitted in both Nature and wildlife photography.
9. There is no requirement that the animal or plant being photographed is indigenous to the country in which the image is captured.
10. Images of exotic plants (plants that do not naturally grow in the area where they are photographed) are acceptable provided they are not hybrid or cultivated.
11. Images of exotic animals are acceptable provided they are not feral or domestic animals and have to be free and unrestrained.
12. Carcasses of extant species are accepted.
13. Landscapes and geological formations cannot be the primary subject matter in a Wildlife photograph.
14. In after processing stage, techniques that combine different images are not permitted.
15. Stitching as a means of increasing the subject matter covered by the image is not permitted.
16. Adjustments such as Contrast, Saturation and sharpness must not be excessive.
17. The application of filters that produce images that appear unnatural is not permitted.
18. The final nature image must appear realistic.
19. It is acceptable to use any in camera technique to capture a nature image (Ex: Slow shutter speed that blurs movement is acceptable)

20. It is acceptable to use flash or other forms of artificial lighting to assist in the capture of nature and wildlife images.

21. It is acceptable to capture Nature images with remotely or automatically triggered cameras. (Killen, 2014)

Referring to the definition and discussed clarifications it is clear that wildlife photography and nature photography are very much similar in shape. Meanwhile wildlife and nature photography genres can be separate cleanly and they have different characters as well. Briefly In both genres allows anything to do with natural history except anthropology or archaeology. Different is that nature photography allows all extant organisms, landscapes, geological formations and weather phenomena and the wildlife photography only allows images which its main subject has to be relate with extant organisms like plants and animals that are free and unrestrained in a natural or adopted environment. So it’s explicable that wildlife photography is more specific and has an exact shape than nature photography genre.

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