



Guest: Michele Davies

I am an amateur photography owning my first dslr for about three years. At a local photography group I had the opportunity to attend one of Bob's talks about his extensive experiences in wildlife photography. Bob's professional presentations skills made the event both informative and interesting and I'm sure that most of the attendees took away something useful from the experience. I took away a brochure on one the Wolf workshops. I was most excited to discover the possibility of combining my love of photography with such an awesome wild subject right here in the UK.



March 18th was not a very promising weather wise, and the journey to Reading was foggy cold rainy over cast snowy and grey. The traffic was horrid, we were held up by various accidents and motorway delays. Once aware that I was to be at least half an hour late I called Bob thinking it would mean I may miss out on a substantial part of the workshop. I was met with a reassuring "not to worry", he would do what he could to ensure that I caught up on anything I might miss. In the event I wasn't only one caught in the traffic and the start of events was delayed accordingly.

On arrival I was greeted by Bob who directed me to a much needed mug of tea and biscuits, supplied by the very welcoming center staff. Before I made it to the warm indoors however, I was also greeted, just feet away, by two of the Arctic wolves pacing the inside of the enclosure. Immediately I felt a surge of excitement, the whole of the miserable journey dropped away. The movement of these animals is quite different to that of a dog, the penetrative glare is intense, wary perhaps, but it triggered something inside that filled me with anticipation. I've been to zoos and safari parks but this was different, this felt like the closest I have ever been to something truly wild.

Meetings and greetings complete and Bob started the workshop with some timely camera settings and weather advise. He pointed out that the dull day offered one or two advantages and took pains to establish where each of us were skill wise, adapting his briefings to suit. He was also keen to provide support if any of us had any particular issues or requirements. For myself I had a relatively new 300mm lens and welcomed the advice offered. Another client however was most unfortunate to have their camera seized up. I was impressed that Bob provided them with a more than adequate alternative.

After Bobs presentation the centre staff followed with some great insights into the wolves their habits and history. One of the aims of the centre is to attempt is to dispel much of the myth and legend that has led to the wolves unfortunate and inaccurate reputation as a greedy violent killer. This creature is indeed powerful and magically mysterious but like any other wild animal, is looking only to survive.



They are not domesticated, can not be trained like a dog and are unpredictable. The centre has in place a good informed safety practice. By the end of the day, any fear I may have had, was replaced with a healthy respect for their beauty power and nature. (Actually I would like to bring one home but alas I doubt I could afford the daily replacement furniture)

As promised we were led to not normally accessible locations where great naturalistic photo opportunities were aplenty. The first encounter was with the Arctic wolves their coats were full and healthy if not a little muddy. They were lively and curious offering plenty of distant and close up shots. Bob watched on and dished out advice as and when appropriate. The staff were keen to answer any questions we might have. As we moved about the site the wolves followed, at no point were we unable to see or photograph the animals. I have to say I was transfixed and really forgot about photographs whilst I simply watched.

At the second enclosure the animals were a little more reticent and distant but this offered new challenges. Mine on this occasion was attaching my new lens as I had put the wrong mount cover on, it had stuck fast. Bob to the rescue and all was well. It was right about this point when it began,,, somewhere distantly, a pitched whine which brought tingling goose bumps to the skin. We were surrounded by the cascade of sound. All of them seemed to contribute to the howl. This chorus is something else, it was all I could do to contain myself, I truly wanted to join in. The chorale was repeated a number of times through out the day.

A return to base for our packed lunches, during which Bob offered more on lens/focal length selection for the next element of the day. On the wolf walk we really got up close and personal. Fantastic photo ops and yes you really can stroke a wolf. (Just so you know.. Never stroke a wolf on the head!) This is a great part of the days events.

We then returned to collect tripods and change lenses to take advantage of a viewing platform on site. Towards the end of the day the wolves had become a little less lively, more interested in one another rather than us. Great behaviours to observe. On return to base for a final chat on the day and some post processing advice, I basically missed this because I dilly dallied outside hoping to catch another howling so that I might join in without anyone noticing.



All in all a great day good company both human and lupus, great education both photographic and wolfy. My anticipation for the day was well rewarded with some great photo opportunities, advice and a chance to feel that call of the wild I've heard so much about. To complete the experience as I began to close the car door for the return journey a farewell song was delivered.

Worth it? Defiantly!

Go again? Yes!

What next? Alaska Bob?

Michele Davies