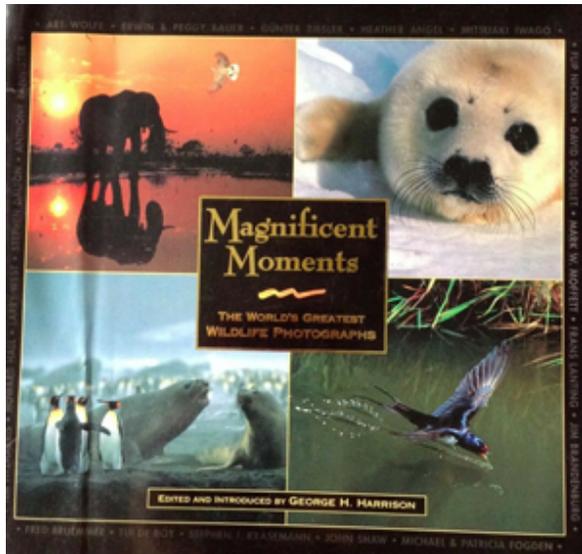


Excerpt from...

Magnificent Moments: The World's Greatest Wildlife Photographs
G.H. Harrison, ed. (1995). Willow Creek Press.



From my desk calendar, a tiger peers at me behind leaf sprays. I flip through the months. A whale fin splashes; butterflies feed at flowers; moonlit elephants bathe and trumpet. Each situation has been the subject of countless photographs. Still, these particular images are unbeatable as artistic statements, technically and aesthetically up-to-date.

In the case of magazine articles, however, I believe most images should dig deeper into new photographic territory. I think of nature photographers as natural historians with film, journalists

transcending color and design to encompass the drama of a species' existence.

An articles's interconnected images tell a story; each one, like a well wrought paragraph, instructs and enthralls. Furthermore, as in ordinary journalism, the goal is to record not simply everyday routine and environment, but decisive moments -- actions or events that may occur once in a subject's lifetime, such as a marriage or bereavement might for a human.

For any publication, then, I look at the proportions of three overlapping types of images. For this book, I have selected one photograph of each kind: decisive moments (typically dramatic action); landscapes; and portraits. In the portrait category, I include rudimentary or commonplace behavior images, such as a bird brooding her young; bugs mating; snakes threatening the camera; a leopard in a blurry dash. While satisfying when executed well, I think portraits weaken a story when they are too numerous, because they draw little from life's most poignant dynamics. On the other hand, a story feels incomplete if a sweep of the subject's environment -- a landscape -- isn't introduced once or twice.

Usually an article with few dramatic action pictures especially suffers, no matter how elegant the presentation or sumptuous the plumage. If the topic were human affairs, viewers might conclude that the photographer had weak emotional or intellectual connections with his own species. In this respect, wildlife photography lags behind other forms of journalism.

The fault lies as much with editors as photographers. In any case, the scarcity of (non-trivial) action photographs suggests opportunities for growth. Rather than improving graphic presentation of familiar events, we should look for new behaviors, new insights to surprise the reader.