



Grizzly, Summer 1987. Photo courtesy of Chuck Bartlebaugh

PHOTO NOTES Association member, Chuck Bartlebaugh of Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, came upon the scene above while driving the one-way Blacktail Deer loop in north central Yellowstone. It was shot from his van using an 800 mm lens.

Almost as interesting as the photo itself is a sticker attached to the back. The label states that proceeds from the sale of his wildlife photos are used through the Center for Wildlife Information "... to develop educational materials emphasizing the individual's responsibilities when photographing, observing and enjoying our wild animals."

This note is preceded by a three paragraph statement on photo ethics from which the following is excerpted:

All of us share the responsibility for our own safety and for that of the animals when we observe them. It is

the responsibility of all photographers to use the proper telephoto lens.

Animals ... may interpret a few steps in their direction as threatening behavior and charge ... [or] may react to human approach by simply leaving the area of their established food source — endangering their ability to reproduce or to make it through a winter's hibernation.

Reading and studying about the animals we wish to photograph and enjoy in their natural habitat will make us more responsible observers.

As the number of wildlife photographers increases in proportion to the number of wild subjects, the need increases for responsible attitudes as well. Mr. Bartlebaugh provides an example of one way to encourage appropriate behavior.

Through-The-Lens Ethics

by Gene Ball

In late September 1986, a female black bear was fortunate enough to discover an elk carcass beside the Gardner River. It was near the 45th parallel, on the bank opposite the "Boiling River" parking area. She fed on the elk for several days and frequently slept on the remains to protect her food source.

She also became one of the most photographed critters in Yellowstone. On any given day the value of all the photo equipment aimed across river at her probably exceeded the park's bear research budget.

Most of the photographers took quiet advantage of the convenient, safe photo

opportunity. But, a few impatient types tossed rocks to try to make the bear produce a more photogenic pose or expression.

Wildlife photography is a fast-growing outdoor pursuit. In the fall, a good bull elk around Mammoth may have more lenses focused on him than he has cows in his harem.

Equipment is better than ever, and more people have high-quality gear. But, along with our through-the-lens light meters we, more than ever, need accurate ethics meters for dealing with wildlife.

Throwing a rock at a bear or to scare a flock of geese into flight is clearly unethical and a form of harassment that simply must be eliminated. However, describing the exact point at which an attempt to observe or photograph becomes harassment is impossible.

A strict definition could argue that harassment begins when your presence causes the subject a caloric loss either due to a need to react, hide, or move or due to being blocked from a food source. Proximity is a crucial factor. But, the distances at which animals will tolerate a photographer with a "threatening" lens aimed at them varies considerably. Tolerable distance is less for robins than eagles, for roadside elk than backcountry elk.

Simple awareness of a photographer's presence is another factor. Heart rate monitors used in a current elk study show noticeable increases when the elk are aware of humans, even before they give outward signs of unease or intent to flee.

The negative caloric impact and its influence on the health and survival of a given animal are subtle but certain.

Causing a degree of stress to wildlife may be unavoidable. Just opening a car door or walking a common trail may displace an animal. But, pursuing intentionally and causing a series of displacements is harassment.

Photographers can also threaten wildlife by habituating an animal or a species group to their presence. This learned tolerance for one human may in turn make a poacher's work easy. The situation is exacerbated by feeding, which of course, is illegal in Yellowstone.

What should be done?

1. Amateurs and professionals alike should consider the cumulative effect on an animal if their actions were multiplied by a dozen — or in Yellowstone perhaps even a thousand other photographers. If your attempt to observe or photograph presents the possibility of harm or interference with your wildlife subject's natural cycle, an ethical question arises.

Setting up too close to an eagle nest,

even with a legal blind, may cause that site to be abandoned in the coming year. Your presence may attract the attention of a predator or may interfere with a natural act of predation.

2. Let's encourage all photographers to put the subject's welfare first. Photographers are a major segment of the public appreciation and learning circle where wild species are concerned. Despite this special role, photographers must avoid feeling that they have a unique prerogative to intrude, to be in front of the front row. Wildlife managers are already well aware that persistent shutterbugs are potentially serious threats to certain species.

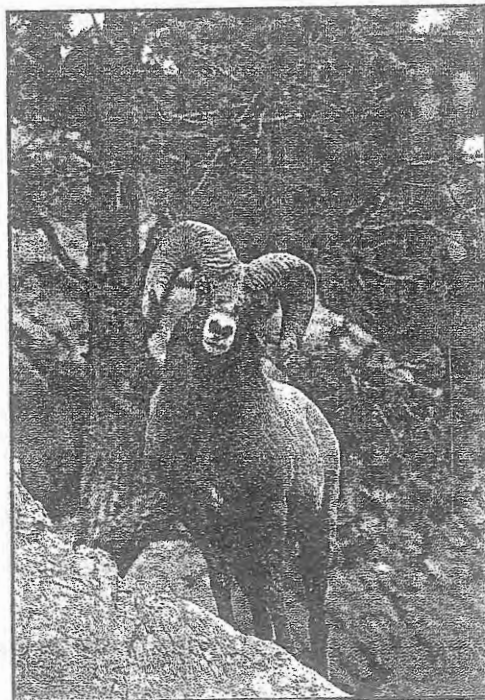
3. If your set up attracts other camera toters to the scene, find an opportunity to talk "wildlife ethics" and spread the word.

4. If you are photographing a dangerous species such as bison or bear, protect the subject by protecting yourself. If you are injured or killed, the animal involved may be killed too.

5. Be careful whom you tell where your "great" subjects can be found. It will be good nature field experience for others to do their own legwork, and may save the animals from harassment or harm.

6. Let's also encourage editors to be concerned and not reward unethical photographers; to be suspicious of those too-good-to-be-true close ups, perfect predation shots, and such; and to find out how the images were obtained.

Obviously, there are cases where photos



Use telephoto lens for close-up shots without stressing your subject.

of captive animals are needed or where baiting may be acceptable. Such photos should be identified for what they are and not allowed to appear as true "taken-in-the-wild" photos. Zoo bears and habituated coyotes should be described as such in the captions.

7. Get the equipment you need to produce the images you seek without invading the subject's comfort zone. For much wildlife, that simply means good telephoto gear so you can set up at a non-disturbing, maximum distance and preserve the integrity of the naturally occurring act you wish to record. Give the telephoto data with the picture so the long-distance approach can be reinforced.

8. Be alert to incidents that harass or harm wildlife, be they poaching or habituation via roadside feeding. You might use your telephoto to record such actions and license numbers for example. Politely inform animal lovers, who are trying to give roadside handouts, that their seemingly harmless and sincere gestures are actually more of a threat than a benefit to the very creatures they care about.

Be alert to signs of poaching, but be careful not to disturb a site where poaching may have occurred. Since Yellowstone is home to many superb specimens, poaching is a recurring problem. If you notice that an animal has suddenly disappeared from its home area or its species group, poaching could be the reason. Offer your photos to enforcement agencies. Many photogenic animals have unusual markings or antler configurations that make them identifiable. Animals that are the easiest to photograph are also the easiest to be taken illegally. Photos of a bull elk with a distinctive rack helped solve a poaching case for the park not long ago.

9. Finally, follow Chuck Bartlebaugh's example and put a message statement on your photos. Whether for sale as exhibition prints or for publication, your work can carry an important extra lesson and help set an ethical standard that will benefit all parties.

If the goal of wildlife photography is to let the subject express itself as a natural species, engaged in natural activity, in a natural setting, the ethical approach will yield the best results for both the photographer and the wild subject.

Suggested for Additional Reading
Bill McRae's "Dying to Photograph Grizzlies," *Sports Afield*, Sept. 1987. and "Focus on Big Game," *Audubon World*, March 1988.