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IN THE
WHITE
HOUSE

REBEL MARCO PIERRE WHITE JR ON
GROWING UP WITH HIS FAMOUS DAD

THE BIG O
OPRAH ON DREAMS,
GOD AND SAYING NO

TOTALLY WILD
PERTH'S MILLIONAIRE COUPLE
TURNED AFRICAN SNAPPERS

STYLE
REINVENTING GUCCI

ELEPHANTS DRINKING AT A WATERHOLE IN BOTSWANA
 – ONE OF THE AMAZING WILDLIFE SHOTS CAPTURED BY
 PERTH MILLIONAIRE COUPLE KYM AND TONYA ILLMAN



Picture: From *Africa on Safari*.

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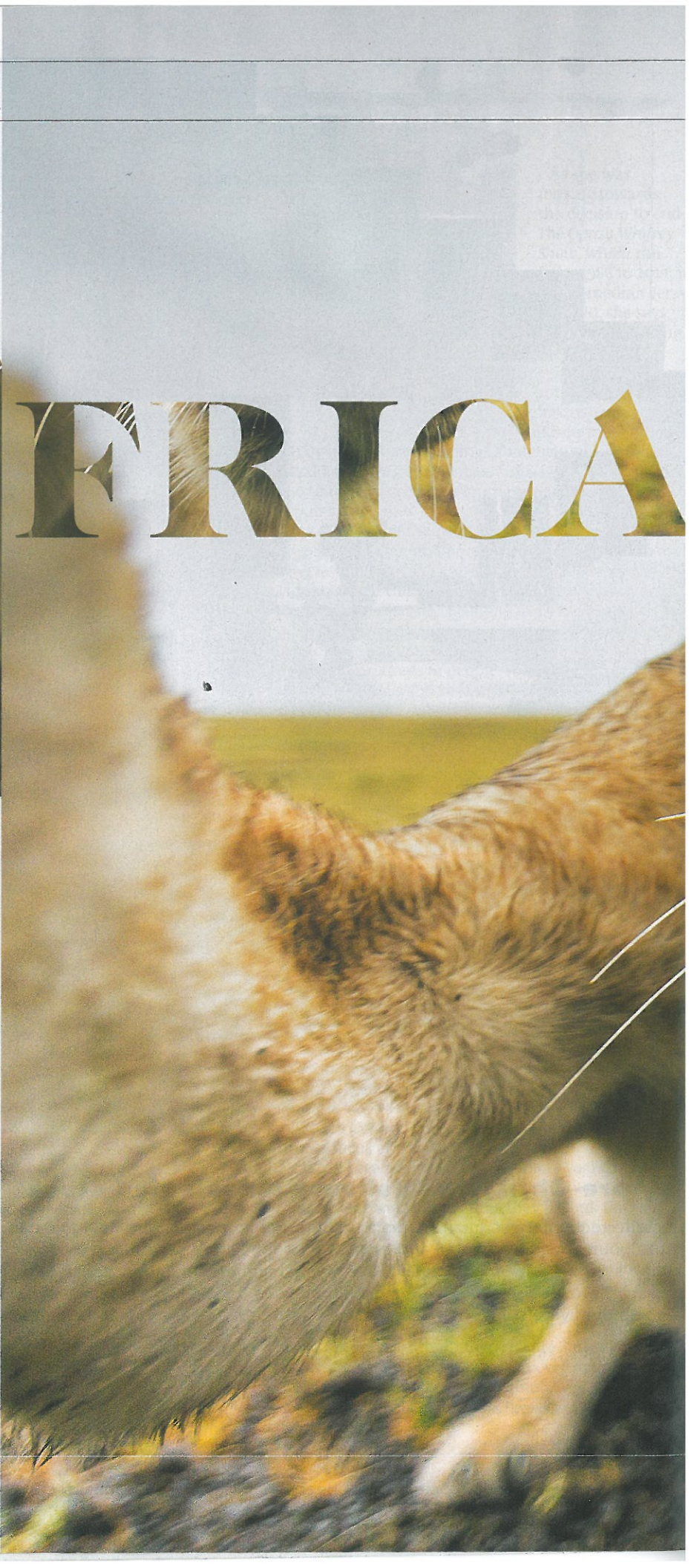


OUT OF

AFRICA

A Perth entrepreneur and his wife have become unlikely wildlife photographers. Now Kym and Tonya Illman, who have had encounters with African creatures great and small, have turned their gripping adventures into a coffee-table book that's being sold worldwide.

Story *Wendy Caccetta* Photography *The Illmans*



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ALATI



The lioness was angry. She sized up Perth multi-millionaire Kym Illman and his wife, Tonya, as they faced off in remote Zimbabwe. The Illmans, keen wildlife photographers, had been sitting at camp having lunch when they heard an almighty ruckus in the distance. They grabbed their cameras and, led by their guides, set off. They climbed a bank and what they discovered was like striking gold for wildlife photographers – three lions chasing each other in a circle around a dead warthog.

“At some point I realised they are going to see

us because we are out in the open, four people,” Illman recalls. “Sure enough, (after) about three or four seconds of this, they just stop and they are all looking at us. There’s this one lion and it’s fixed its gaze on me. I thought, ‘What’s it going to do? Which way is it going to run?’

“Thankfully it ran down a ditch at the back away from us ... We walked around the corner and there was all this dust. You can’t see anything just dust and there’s growling. There’s Tonya first, me two metres away and guide number one and guide number two. Then out of the blue, through the dust, this lioness comes – and it’s savage.” ➤

Illman says the angry lioness stopped about 10m away from them, ready to defend her food.

"That was the only time I felt in any danger," he says. "I kept thinking, 'Maybe I'm getting too confident and trusting the guides too much?'"

In the past two and a half years the Illmans have made about 13 photo safaris to Africa. It started as an indulgence, a holiday with their two boys, Tyler and Jayce. Then the trips got serious. Now Illman and his wife are finding fame as international wildlife photographers. *Africa on Safari*, a photographic coffee-table book of the animals they have encountered in their travels through Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Botswana, Zimbabwe and South Africa, has been published by a boutique British firm and was released in London last month. In Germany, it has been published by *National Geographic*.

The entrepreneurial Illman, founder and managing director of Perth-based Messages on Hold, admits that his wife had to drag him on that first safari to Kenya with their sons, who were then 11 and 13. Up until then he had been concentrating his amateur photographic endeavours on Lancelin. But he admits by the end of it, he was hooked.

The couple have spent about three months of every year since then patiently stalking lions, giraffes, hippos, gorillas, rhinos, cheetahs and elephants. Illman's arsenal of photographic gear has grown to include remote-controlled camera buggies that he can manoeuvre up to the animals, and quadcopters with GoPro cameras that can be flown above them.

The gear weighs 70kg. He says Paul Kirui, chairman of the Kenya Professional Safari Guides Association, tells him only the BBC hauls more with them.

Illman says one of the secrets to getting the perfect shot is to find out-of-the-way places. Even in deepest, darkest Africa there are paparazzi swarms with the animals as stars and eager tourists behind the lenses.

"You want to be able to spend five hours with a leopard," he says. "You couldn't get that in Tanzania. In the Masai Mara (game reserve in Kenya) you'd never get it because once a leopard is found, sometimes there are 40 cars there and it's just plain ugly and really depressing to see so many cars with this poor animal just being hemmed in. I don't even know if a natural habitat is an animal with 40 cars and it's zigzagging in between the cars. That's like a car park. It's what it's like on some of the safaris.

"You would have heard of the crossings in Mara with the wildebeest. No one ever shows you the 30 cars that side of the river and the 30 cars this side. But this is what it's like. And then you will get, in particular the Chinese, who think it's OK to get out of the car and wander between cars to take photos.

"That's a big no-no, but if they have a lousy guide and the guide doesn't care, there are humans walking around and there might be 40,000 of these things coming across the river. That's what happens. There is a lot of human interaction in busy places.

"But when you get out to some of the places in Zimbabwe that we went to, some of the Botswana places where they have thin ground traffic, that's a photographer's dream."

Illman picked up tips around the campfire about



the best spots to visit. For some of the expeditions he paid up to about \$2200 per person per night to visit isolated areas where the opportunities were reputed to be exceptional and the crowds minimal. He learnt about one of his favourite places to take photos, Katavi National Park in Tanzania, from a Russian he encountered and who insisted he go.

"He was telling me the whole night, 'You got to go to Katavi,'" Illman recalls.

"He said, 'Lions, elephants, hippos'. He said only go in September or October when the water dries up. At other times you'd have a river that runs 10km and you'd have 10,000 hippos and it was very sparsely populated.

"Once the water dries up this is what happens: You get 1000 hippos and the crocodiles live right with them and every afternoon there are fights. They get out of the water. This is bankable. Four o'clock they



Clockwise from far left
A herd of elephants near Zarafa Camp, Botswana.

Eland antelope and zebras near Manyara Ranch, Tanzania.

A leopard at Londolozi Game Reserve, South Africa.

Photographs from *Africa on Safari*.

start. They start attacking each other over territory. You don't often get to see that sort of action.

"The beauty of this place is that most times you are stuck in a car, especially around hippos because they are so darn dangerous.

"This place has a pool where you can stand on this rockery bit and be a metre and a half from a hippo and be perfectly safe because they can't climb up. Sometimes I would put a camera on a mono pod and hang it right near the back of a hippo and be a metre away. Those shots anywhere else are impossible."

Hippos and lions would sometimes wander through the couple's camp at night, which Illman says can be a little disconcerting when all that separates you are the canvas sheets of your tent.

He says another area in the Serengeti in northern Tanzania proved a boon for photos of lions on rocks. "Most photographers would kill for a shot of a lion on a rock. Two lions on a rock is a real killer. Mating on rocks, I'm not sure I've ever seen it," he says, displaying a picture of two amorous lions on a rock.

Illman says there have been many memorable close encounters with the animals. There was the hippo that emerged out of the mud to surprise him. Gorillas have brushed up against them in Rwanda. Curious cheetahs have jumped aboard their safari vehicle to take a closer look. The animals are mostly curious, but on the odd occasion Illman and his wife have been charged by lions, elephants and hippos.

"You never run, ever," he says. "You just have to stand there."

Illman sent some of his photographs, including an eye-catching 1.8m-high print of a giraffe, and a book idea to Papadakis Publisher in London last year. It had been a book, *Wild Africa*, by Italian Alex



Kym and Tonya Illman in Tanzania.

YOU CAN STAND ON THIS ROCKERY BIT AND BE A METRE AND A HALF FROM A HIPPO AND BE PERFECTLY SAFE

Bernasconi, published by Papadakis, that had first inspired the Illmans to put together their own.

Their book, which consists of about 70 per cent of Illman's photos, 20 per cent by his wife and 10 per cent as a joint effort, was launched at the London Science Museum last month. Illman is optimistic it will soon also be published in the US.

For their next trip the Illmans are planning to visit Chad in February, followed by Kenya in April. As for right now, he's just proud of his book.

"It's been a great challenge," he says.

He says the money people are paying for photographic safaris are helping to preserve the animals' environments.

"My hope is for people who read this book that they will say, 'Right, let's go to Africa,'" Illman says. "Because with your \$20,000 you spend on your safari that will help that area be set aside for this."

"The moment people stop going ... that does them harm. There's increased pressure put on by farmers and at some point you won't be seeing elephants because of land encroachment and poaching." **STM**
Africa on Safari, \$65, is out now in bookstores, on Amazon and at kymillman.com (where the Illmans will autograph copies).