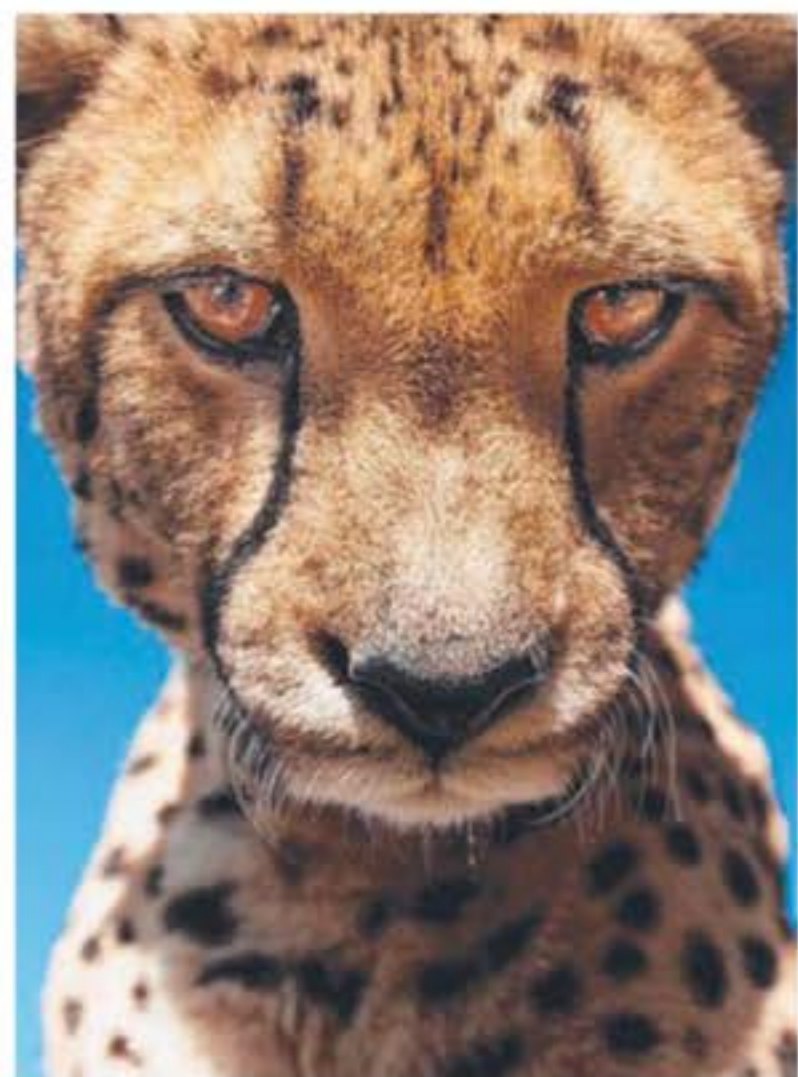




OUT OF AFRICA

An Aussie couple has made an art of seeing eye-to-eye with the native wildlife of Africa, writes Gillian Cumming



WHEN YOU'RE NEXT TO LIONS, AND YOU'RE VERY CLOSE TO ELEPHANTS – MAJOR AND AMAZING ANIMALS – IT'S LIKE NOTHING ELSE. IT'S BETTER THAN SHOPPING!

KYMILLMAN



What's it like to get up close and uncomfortable with a lion, or a tiger, a hippo or a hyena?

Kym and Tonya Illman know, but instead of shivering in their safari boots, they're as cool as cucumbers as they work with hi-tech photographic gadgetry, intent on capturing the best-ever close-ups of Africa's majestic wildlife.

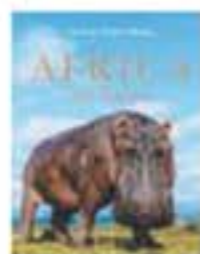
The results are breathtaking, as their exquisite coffee-table book, *Africa on Safari*, reveals.

Lion cubs stare inquisitively into the camera lens at eye level – and directly at you – with every whisker on their furry faces crisp and countable.

The half-human, half-ape worldly stare of a gorilla – gentle creatures whose numbers are starting to climb again in the wild.

Scarred torsos of brutish buffalo who battle the wild. An elephant's eyelashes. Or the snarls and growls that are the norm of lions mating – fangs bared, teeth like jagged pinnacles.

The images are remarkable, and just as remarkable is how the Illmans found themselves to-



AFRICA ON SAFARI
Papadakis
Publisher, \$65

WILD AT HEART: Images from *Africa on Safari*. See behind the scenes vision and order *Africa on Safari* at kymillman.com

tally absorbed by their penchant for wildlife photography – a passion that now sees them divide their time between running an audio production business from their home base of Perth in Western Australia and travelling the vast African continent for three months every year on adventure holiday.

It all began about 20 years ago when Tonya Illman, sick of her husband's refusal to join her on a safari, simply went ahead and booked flights for a family holiday with their two sons to Africa.

"I didn't think I'd enjoy it," Kym says of his many years of unwillingness to join Tonya on safari. "It didn't seem like me."

On that first trip, on their first evening in Nairobi National Park, they came across a pride of lions lazing on the road. Cameras grabbed, the couple started clicking away. Suddenly, says Kym, "I was hooked on safaris".

He'd packed a couple of wildlife books for that first trip and

soon was taken with the idea of capturing the perfect photograph.

The Illmans quickly realised that what they loved to capture most in their photographs was a connection between their subject and the lens – drawing the viewer into the scenery and eye to eye with the animals.

While most wildlife photography is from the angle of looking down from the top of a vehicle, the Illmans have become expert at capturing intimate perspectives that tell stories about the wild.

They use a range of photography equipment and techniques, including drones and remote-controlled camera buggies, to get the best shots. They've even buried their cameras in dung, if that is what it takes!

"We liked the fact that there's something to do all the time," says Kym, who admits there's been the occasional close shave when they've got a little too close to the wildlife.



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AS SOON AS WE LANDED BACK HOME I WAS STRAIGHT BACK ON TO RESEARCHING OTHER CAMPS AND AREAS

"It's a full day – up at dawn and out to about Ilam then back to camp for lunch, a rest, then out again for another four hours. It's really a total immersion in that experience."

"When you're next to lions, and you're very close to elephants – major and amazing animals – it's like nothing else. It's better than shopping!"

The couple has also become adept at shooting marvellous, breathtaking panoramas – of elephants herding at a waterhole or an elegant line of giraffes meandering across an open plain in Kenya.

And after that first trip to Africa 20 years ago, what did Kym Illman do as soon as he got home?

"As soon as we landed back home I was straight back on to researching other camps and areas," Kym says.

They returned to Africa eight weeks later... and 20 years and 13 safaris on, the love affair continues.



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