

Through a lens naturally

Successful nature photography is a fusion of three skills – the ability to see pictures, to handle a camera quickly and confidently, and to find and approach the subject. Those fortunate enough to own a copy of

The Ancient Islands (Port Nicholson Press, text by Les Molloy), will recognise that Brian Enting possesses the above three skills in abundance, his outstanding photography contributing to arguably one of the finest natural history books on New Zealand. In this article, he outlines some of the essential ingredients for capturing those special shots.



New Zealand birds are notoriously difficult to photograph, especially in the forest. A telephoto lens and large reserves of patience are the main requirements of successful bird photography. The wood pigeon (kereru) is a little easier than most forest birds to capture.

The surf crashed repeatedly on to the head land at Karekare on Auckland's west coast. It was exciting dodging the waves and experiencing the thrill of the powerful wave action. I retreated to safer ground to change a lens, making what was almost a fatal mistake – I turned my back on the sea. Next minute I was under water, gear and all. Fortunately I have lived to tell the tale, but later I learned that locals seldom make that mistake and it's usually the visitors who are drowned.

My photographs were literally a wash out, and some of my gear ruined beyond repair, all in less than 60 seconds. Next day I salvaged some close ups of safer topics.

This incident contrasts with a bush fire just beyond the borders of Carnarvon National Park in Queensland. Using a very wide angle lens – (15mm) – to maximise the depth of the drama of the fire, I darted

over the burning coals to get close to the fire while ensuring at all times that an escape route was clear. As the fire ignited fresh patches of vegetation, it flared, the heat scorching my skin and eventually forcing retreat.

Both of these incidents involved risk, one was calculated, the other not. During both incidents I was working very quickly, the adrenalin pumping through my system as I made quick decisions and called on all my photographic training and intuition to catch the right moment.

Of course nature or environmental photography is not all drama and excitement. In fact it requires a great deal of preparation and patience, involving long periods of waiting. The photograph of the white-fronted tern reproduced here is the result of a reconnoitre several days before, a 500mm lense, heavy tripod, three and a

half hours of waiting and 72 shots.

Lifelong fascination

Fundamental to my environmental photography is a lifelong fascination with nature and especially the processes of nature. I simply love the subject and therefore three and a half hours photographing one bird is pleasure, combining the enjoyment of observation with the thrill of the hunt. The great advantage is that the trophy is a photograph that can be shared with others, while the subject remains alive and undisturbed.

It is terribly important that nature photographers respect their subjects and have a conservation conscience. There have been numerous times when I have withdrawn from a situation without a photograph rather than destroy something through insensitivity. The most recent inci-