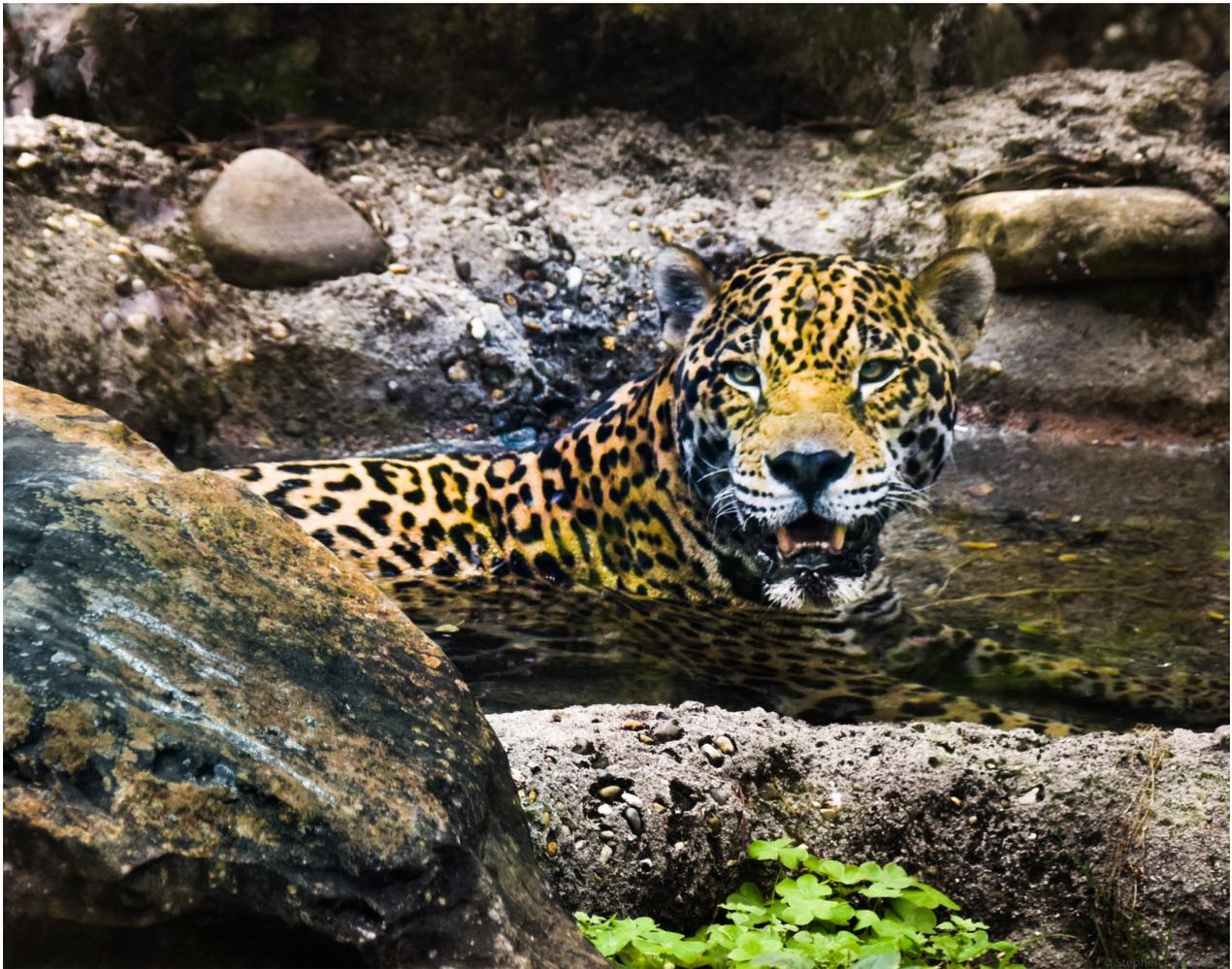


How to Get the Shot

Revealing the secrets behind
unforgettable photography

Blog #104: Capturing the Leopard



A Leopard cools off in a wet spot on a hot afternoon.

There is a thrilling moment when you are photographing a wild animal and it looks RIGHT AT YOU. I don't know if it is the sense of being evaluated as a threat or a meal, but there is an eye-to-eye connecting that makes you somewhat relieved that there is a fence or a plane of glass between you and a 50-to-150 pound animal that can run 80 miles an hour!

Zoos are a great place to photograph animals, especially if they are housed in a natural setting where there is a moat between you and the animals so you can capture them without bars or glass reflections interfering with the shot.

In the case of this cheetah, there was a glass panel between me and the cheetah's quarters, but it was a large panel and I was able to get photographs without much reflection by using a polarizing lens. I got to the location as the trainer was feeding the cheetah between bars. Such fun. After eating, the cheetah circled around the area several times not far from us.

Most people took a quick look at the cheetah and moved on, but I settled in for a bit to see what it would do, hoping for a good shot, and the show was worth the wait. As the cheetah moved in closer, you could sense its cat-like movement and the strength of its physique. And then it took a surprising turn. It approached a tree limb over a pond and worked its way under the branch, slowly lowering itself into the water. It came up with a growl, and then settled into the water until it found a Zen place. And just to punctuate the journey, it turned to me and flashed a tooth-filled smile, that said “I know you’re there and I’m in control”. As I have shared this photo, the biggest reaction is how rare it is to see a cheetah in the water, but it seemed like the perfect afternoon break on a sunny day.

There are tremendous opportunities to capture wildlife in zoos today. On the same day I photographed the leopard, I was also able to get a wonderful shot of a Silverback Gorilla, but that was a story of patience. The gorilla sat with his back to the visitors for the longest time. Many people came and went, but eventually the massive beast leaned forward and strolled in full profile. Its fur was spectacular, you could see the muscular strength in its legs, and its face conveyed the serious expression of a seasoned statesman knowing its place of authority in the world.



A Second Photo Opportunity

TAKEAWAYS

1. Be patient. Animals in nature can present wonderful photo opportunities, but they do so on their own schedules.
2. Look for photo opportunities like set times when they feed the animals or feature them in wildlife lectures.
3. Zoos provide great opportunities. Consider going mid week or early when there are less crowd.
4. Don't miss an opportunity for a return visit a favorite animal -even on the same day. New perspective and your last experience will suggest new opportunities and angles,