



A Wild-Angle View

It's a jungle inside Matthew P. Scott's office at Stanford University. Here, you might spot a dusty, wrinkled elephant munching on the branches of a bush in Zambia, or a sleek Tanzanian leopard looking down from its perch in a tree. Or you might find a Black-crowned Night Heron from the wetlands of San Francisco Bay staring grumpily back at you.

These are the kinds of vivid snapshots of nature's treasures that hang on Scott's walls and continually cycle through the screen saver of his computer, which connects to 20,000 digital photographs he has shot at locations around the world.

In his lab, Scott's experiments delve into the molecular processes that determine how cells grow and animal embryos morph into their basic forms. Yet, confessing to a particular fondness for photographing "the outcomes" of the developmental processes he studies, the HHMI investigator never loses sight of life's big picture. "When you go out into parts of Africa and see the shapes of exotic plants and animals," says Scott, "that's our friends the genes at work."

Scott grew up in Newton, Massachusetts, known as "The Garden City," where his father, a professional photographer, turned him on to the art and science of the camera. As a boy in love with nature, at age 12 he began taking black and white pictures of wildflowers and critters with a manual 35 mm Kodak Retina.

Today, delighting in the instant feedback of digital photography, Scott switches between a professional-quality

Nikon D200 camera and a Sony HDR-FX1 video camcorder, which he has taken underwater on diving trips. The objects of his visual interest are oftentimes remote, such as elephants and hippos along the Zambezi River in Zambia, which he visited last summer with his family.

Scott's most fascinating wildlife encounter was in 2002, when he and his wife, Stanford biologist Margaret T. Fuller, hunkered down in Uganda's Bwindi Impenetrable National Park to watch foraging mountain gorillas. "I saw so much humanity in those eyes and so much curiosity coming right back," he says, "it wouldn't have surprised me if they pulled out a field guide to humans."

Only about 600 mountain gorillas remain. "In our lifetimes we're watching the last wild areas either disappear or become so distorted or deprived of their flagship species that the nature of the earth is changing at an incredible speed, right before our eyes," says Scott, a staunch supporter of the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International, and other conservation groups.

Returning from Uganda, he edited his video footage into a home movie that opens with a cluster of lighted candles. They flicker out, one by one, into darkness—a metaphorical warning about what the gorillas' future could hold. Scott sees his photography as a way of conveying the preciousness of endangered habitats to family, friends, colleagues, and, perhaps, the rest of the world. —*Ingfei Chen*



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MATTHEW SCOTT