

With exotic locations, photographing animals in the wild can be a romantic adventure, but it is also very hard work and sometimes dangerous.

Two Norfolk wildlife photographers, Martin Smith and Mike Powles, have recently won prizes in the coveted BG Wildlife Photographer of the Year Competition.

John Worrall reports

Norfolk wildlife photographers, Martin Smith and Mike Powles, have won prizes in the prestigious BG Wildlife Photographer of the Year Competition. Martin was highly commended in the Animal Behaviour: All Other Animals category with a photograph of a female crocodile carrying her young, while Mike won the World in Our Hands section with a caged panda at a captive breeding programme in China.

Talk to either of them about those photographs and their work generally and you can't help but get a sense of the great outdoors as most of us never experience it, even though we see the fruits of their labour. These guys often go bush in the literal sense, blending with the most elemental of backgrounds to get their shots.

Take Martin's crocodile stories. His highly commended photograph was shot amid Madagascan mangroves in a hide close to a crocodile's nest with no other protection than some equipment boxes.

"One crocodile hatched out and immediately set off in my direction," he says. "It began calling out when only four metres away from me. Its mother looked up and, climbing over the other adults' heads, trundled towards me. Stopping to pick up her new hatchling, she turned around and headed nestwards, leaving me to sigh with relief."

Then there was the time he got the tide wrong.

"I was in the mangroves and the water rose into the hide with crocs swimming around me. I had no idea of the tide levels for that day – you can't always get tide tables locally – and the water kept rising and pushing the crocodiles towards me. It was fantastic for filming but my assistant had run off and I had to pick up gear carefully and put things into the rucksack while the water rose around my ankles and then my knees. But I kept on filming."

It can also be a long day. "In that particular place I spent six days in the hide, from five in the morning, returning to camp – a tent in a dried up river – about 6.30 in the evening."

Wildlife film cameraman is his main job these days although he always carries the stills cameras, having been a photographer, amateur or professional, since his youth – he actually provided



Wings over North Norfolk
Photo: Martin Smith

hot shots



Martin Smith's highly commended photograph of a female crocodile carrying her young. Photo: © Martin Smith, BG Wildlife Photographer of the Year Competition organised by 'BBC Wildlife Magazine' and the Natural History Museum, London

the front cover photograph for the first *Norfolk Journal* ten years ago and worked regularly for the magazine in the late 80s and early 90s.

In the last few years, he has worked for *Anglia Survival*, scripting and shooting films about the River Wensum and a Norfolk wood, and he has worked on *Life of Birds* with David Attenborough. For that he was also filming mostly in East Anglia but he did spend a week in Texas on the trail of a bird called the dicksissle, locating the only one which hadn't yet migrated in 44,000 acres of prairie, all for 30 seconds of programme.

Another project was *Living Britain*, a six part series first shown on television last year, where his footage included the cliff erosion at Happisburgh.

"I went there every other month, filming from a lock-on post, and with editing, I had a montage showing 60 metres of cliff disappearing."

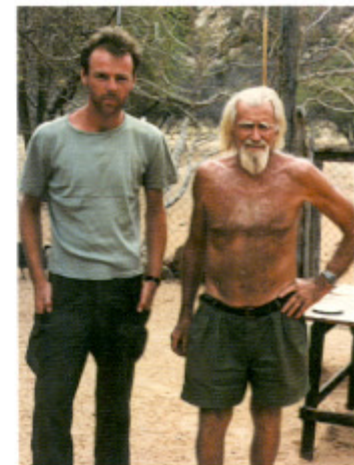
More recently he has spent one and a half months in Peru for *Survival*, filming macaw and blue headed parrots, tapirs and peccaries at clay licks in the Amazon basin. Three days upriver by dugout from a jungle airstrip with a cook and guide, he was digging ticks out of his skin every night.

"You can get used to that sort of thing," he says. "Although this time I had a heat rash which I had never had before."

But to a great extent, this is a labour of love.

"The film of the crocodiles in Madagascar will be the first time that they have been documented like this and it's good to show the danger they are in. There is the illegal skin trade but also the fact that people don't want crocodiles in their rivers where kids swim and women do the washing. A lot of crocodile nests had been raided by humans and smashed eggs were everywhere."

Mike Powles has trodden a slightly different path. Originally an engineer, he had worked at various places around the world without getting too involved with photography although he was always interested in wildlife, particularly birdwatching before it became "all green wellies and waxed jackets" as he puts it.



Martin Smith pictured with George Adamson, of 'Born Free' fame