



A day with...

Photographer Suzi Eszterhas

By Megan McCrea

Suzi Eszterhas

IN HER 20S, SUZI ESZTERHAS DREAMED OF BECOMING A FULL-TIME WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER — a goal she'd been pursuing since childhood, when she'd snap pictures of Steller's jays and hummingbirds in her San Rafael backyard. "My dream was to photograph cheetahs," Eszterhas recalls. Then, one day, she got an email from lodge owners she'd befriended in the Serengeti. "It said, 'hey, there's cheetah cubs out. You should come.'" Eszterhas quit her day job in PR at an animal shelter, drained her savings, and headed to Africa. She wound up staying three years.

Since then, she has built her career shooting wildlife photos for the likes of the New York Times, BBC Wildlife, and children's magazine Ranger Rick. When she's not on location in places like India or Tanzania, she's leading photo tours, writing books, and overseeing Girls Who Click, a nonprofit she founded to offer free nature photography workshops to teen girls. She has two books out soon: "My Wild Life: Adventures of a Wildlife Photographer" for children and "New on Earth," a coffee-table book.

This year, since abruptly returning from a shoot in Botswana in mid-March, Eszterhas, 44, has been sheltering in place at her home in Petaluma, and appreciating the backyard beauty of Sonoma County.

6:30 a.m. I wake up and meditate for 20 minutes or so, read something that's important to me, like Ram Dass, and then write in a gratitude journal.

8:00 a.m. Make coffee and breakfast — oats with berries and milk — then start work. I have a call with my friend Janet Kleyn, an amazing photographer who's usually based on the Mashatu Game Reserve in Botswana. She's currently sheltering-in-place in South Africa and, next week, she'll teach an online workshop on smartphone photography for Girls Who Click. We discuss her lesson plan. Then I call my tracker for an update on a female leopard I've been photographing for two years for a passion project. We talk about what she's up to, how her cub is

growing, and when it might be safe for me to return for another shoot. Finally, I email a safari company in Botswana, a boat captain in British Columbia, and a bush pilot in the Central African Republic, to iron out logistics for my 2022 tours.

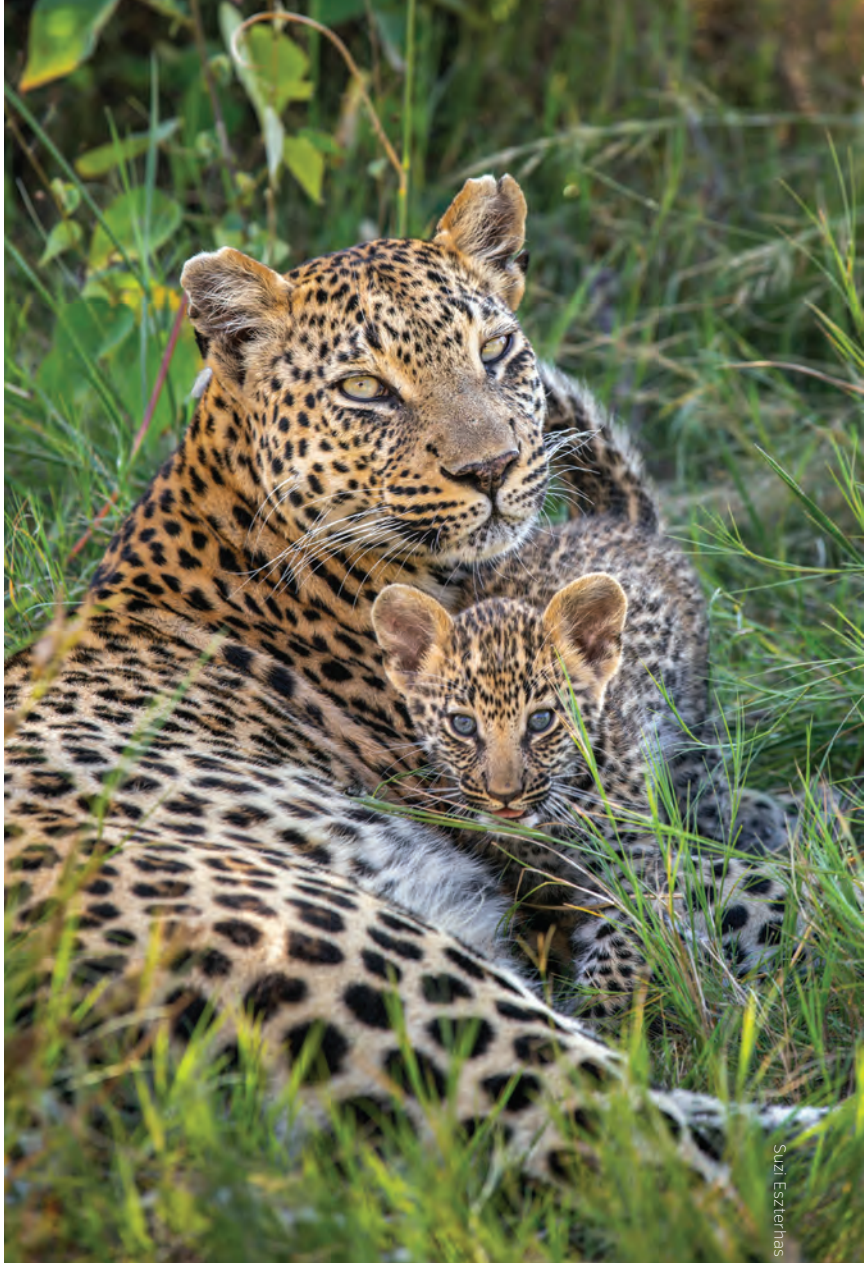
12:00 p.m. I head to downtown Petaluma for a treat — takeout from Lunchette, their smoked trout salad. Then I take a hike in Helen Putnam Regional Park. I love going there at different times of year, seeing the change in seasons.

3:00 p.m. Back at the home office, I review some layouts for “New on Earth.” We’re still finalizing everything. Depending on our final page count, we might pull in extra photos.

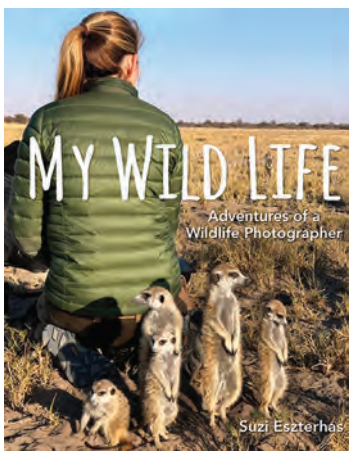


5:30 p.m. Pack my gear, then drive to Santa Rosa in time for golden hour. I’m on assignment for Ranger Rick, shooting at this massive bird rookery in the middle of this suburban area. The birds are starting to pipe up; they’re loudest at night. It smells like guano. I set up with my big telephoto and my long 500-mm lens, then wait for birds to fly in with nesting material or for parents to come feed their young. Cars are whizzing past. And above, there are great egrets, snowy egrets, cattle egrets, and black-crowned night herons nesting in these trees. It’s such a spectacle!

8:30 p.m. Back home, I make turkey-kale stew. I get teased a lot for my kale consumption. Super Californian! After dinner, I turn to my mail. When children write to me, I try to always reply personally, no matter how busy I am. Today’s letters are from a boy in Florida and a girl from my hometown, San Rafael. When I finish, I add them to the stack of prints and book orders I’m taking to the post office tomorrow — that’s been part of my shelter-in-place routine, heading down to the post office with a backpack full of prints and books to send. At 10:30, I turn in for the night. **S**



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Suzi Eszterhas's new children's book, "My Wild Life: Adventures of a Wildlife Photographer" comes out in October. "New on Earth," a coffee table book of her travels is slated for release in spring 2021.

To see more of her work, visit suzieszterhas.com.