Preface

Three Lives

About the photographer

Michael Poliza is the Marco Polo of the New Millennium. As a young entrepreneur he introduced Germany to the digital world, then he went on a thousand-day journey to Australia,venturing into remote wilderness and remote places, the first of which was called the Osa Peninsula. There followed an interlude of three years during which he was at the head of a multinational organization: Polisoft, with its fifty young employees. From then on he shared an office with the board of trustees of the World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) with its 1.3 million employees, then for a year he also worked as editor-in-chief of Akademie, and for a further year he ran the Museum für Kommunikation, Heidelberg.

Michael Poliza

Three Lives

When Michael Poliza talks about himself and his eventful life, he does so at a speed that either makes you seriously doubt his endurance in the wild or, on the contrary, allows you to imagine quite a bit of balancing elements in his life. For years, he was hell-bent on getting his hands on the latest technologies and media, and through visionary business acumen, he had the venture funded by prominent international sponsors. The book and DVD about this unique journey still reveal the world in a whole new way to tens of thousands of people.

About the photographer

Michael Poliza is the Marco Polo of the New Millennium. As a young entrepreneur he introduced Germany to the digital world, then he went on a thousand-day journey to Australia,venturing into remote wilderness and remote places, the first of which was called the Osa Peninsula. There followed an interlude of three years during which he was at the head of a multinational organization: Polisoft, with its fifty young employees. From then on he shared an office with the board of trustees of the World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) with its 1.3 million employees, then for a year he also worked as editor-in-chief of Akademie, and for a further year he ran the Museum für Kommunikation, Heidelberg.

Michael Poliza

Three Lives

When Michael Poliza talks about himself and his eventful life, he does so at a speed that either makes you seriously doubt his endurance in the wild or, on the contrary, allows you to imagine quite a bit of balancing elements in his life. For years, he was hell-bent on getting his hands on the latest technologies and media, and through visionary business acumen, he had the venture funded by prominent international sponsors. The book and DVD about this unique journey still reveal the world in a whole new way to tens of thousands of people.

Preface

Three Lives

About the photographer

Michael Poliza is the Marco Polo of the New Millennium. As a young entrepreneur he introduced Germany to the digital world, then he went on a thousand-day journey to Australia,venturing into remote wilderness and remote places, the first of which was called the Osa Peninsula. There followed an interlude of three years during which he was at the head of a multinational organization: Polisoft, with its fifty young employees. From then on he shared an office with the board of trustees of the World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) with its 1.3 million employees, then for a year he also worked as editor-in-chief of Akademie, and for a further year he ran the Museum für Kommunikation, Heidelberg.

Michael Poliza

Three Lives

When Michael Poliza talks about himself and his eventful life, he does so at a speed that either makes you seriously doubt his endurance in the wild or, on the contrary, allows you to imagine quite a bit of balancing elements in his life. For years, he was hell-bent on getting his hands on the latest technologies and media, and through visionary business acumen, he had the venture funded by prominent international sponsors. The book and DVD about this unique journey still reveal the world in a whole new way to tens of thousands of people.

Preface

Three Lives

About the photographer

Michael Poliza is the Marco Polo of the New Millennium. As a young entrepreneur he introduced Germany to the digital world, then he went on a thousand-day journey to Australia,venturing into remote wilderness and remote places, the first of which was called the Osa Peninsula. There followed an interlude of three years during which he was at the head of a multinational organization: Polisoft, with its fifty young employees. From then on he shared an office with the board of trustees of the World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) with its 1.3 million employees, then for a year he also worked as editor-in-chief of Akademie, and for a further year he ran the Museum für Kommunikation, Heidelberg.

Michael Poliza

Three Lives

When Michael Poliza talks about himself and his eventful life, he does so at a speed that either makes you seriously doubt his endurance in the wild or, on the contrary, allows you to imagine quite a bit of balancing elements in his life. For years, he was hell-bent on getting his hands on the latest technologies and media, and through visionary business acumen, he had the venture funded by prominent international sponsors. The book and DVD about this unique journey still reveal the world in a whole new way to tens of thousands of people.

Preface

Three Lives

About the photographer

Michael Poliza is the Marco Polo of the New Millennium. As a young entrepreneur he introduced Germany to the digital world, then he went on a thousand-day journey to Australia,venturing into remote wilderness and remote places, the first of which was called the Osa Peninsula. There followed an interlude of three years during which he was at the head of a multinational organization: Polisoft, with its fifty young employees. From then on he shared an office with the board of trustees of the World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) with its 1.3 million employees, then for a year he also worked as editor-in-chief of Akademie, and for a further year he ran the Museum für Kommunikation, Heidelberg.

Michael Poliza

Three Lives

When Michael Poliza talks about himself and his eventful life, he does so at a speed that either makes you seriously doubt his endurance in the wild or, on the contrary, allows you to imagine quite a bit of balancing elements in his life. For years, he was hell-bent on getting his hands on the latest technologies and media, and through visionary business acumen, he had the venture funded by prominent international sponsors. The book and DVD about this unique journey still reveal the world in a whole new way to tens of thousands of people.
necessary to execute his idea of sailing around the globe and reporting daily via the Internet. The “STARSHIP MILLENIUM” was to be the first ship ever to use satellite technology to send pictures of the most remote reaches of the planet. The ship was equipped with a scientific laboratory, a state-of-the-art medical station, and a high-tech computer system. The crew consisted of a team of experts in various fields, including marine biology, geography, and technology.

But the peace and quiet can disappear in a flash. “Then suddenly everything turns to chaos. The hyenas approach from the left, a lion from the right, an elephant from the middle and all around you there’s nothing but a loud racket and a lot of screaming going on.”

Then it is best to keep one’s cool. When the elephant moves toward the photographer sitting in its Land Rover, approaching to within ten feet, and the photographer consciously ignores the bush giant until the last second, the white trying to get a close-up shot of the soles of the elephant’s feet—which, in such cases, is quite useful to be able to determine the point at which seems to be a pretend attack turns into a real threat.

We’ve seen plenty of close-up pictures of animals. But Poliza focuses so acutely on the details that his images not only have a visually impressive effect but a uniquely expressive power. In fact, they demonstrate the focused perspective and signal-oriented vision of the animals themselves. Don’t the lions of the lion king express enough of the animal’s entire authoritative majesty? Could a view of his nose and his paw in the buffalo’s flesh be enough to make us feel the violence of the situation? Have we ever taken a close look at the mysterious soles of elephants’ feet—which, according to the latest scientific findings, they use to communicate with their tasked friends within a radius of more than seven miles by generating low-frequency tones and vibrations in the earth?

Many of Poliza’s photos are “simply the reward” for waiting a long time. This passionate picture-hunter is out stalking the lion from sunrise at half past five or sitting in his Land Rover with 600 to 1200 mm lenses at the ready in his lap. The shot of the leopard baby with its mother, for example, required precisely 72 hours of patient observation and waiting in the bush. Only then did the longed-for mother return required precisely 72 hours of patient observation and waiting in the bush. Only then did the longed-for mother return.

The giraffes at the Linyanti Game Reserve in Botswana are familiar with vehicles, allowing Michael Poliza to move within 65 yards of the long-necked creatures. He maneuvered and parked the Land Rover in an inauspicious and calculated fashion so as to get a good view of the frontal geometry of the giraffe’s legs without irritating these shy creatures in the slightest way. Poliza did not even dare leave the vehicle; this would have drastically disturbed the silhouette and cause the giraffe to flee. His solution was to simply open the door, lie flat on the vehicle’s floor and balance the telephoto lens (which weighs more than 30 pounds) until he was able to get a sharply focused shot of the symmetrical alignment of the giraffe’s legs. He proudly proclaims this “a moment of pure luck”—which he has not been able to repeat since 2002.

Funny Coincidences

A rhinoceros on the beach is not a subject you come across every day—never, actually. The fact that Poliza was able to take this extraordinary photo is due to the trust of a rhino that had been raised by the National Park employees in the Matsundza Range of the Kariba Reservoir in Zimbabwe and later released into the wild. When the rhinoceros noticed Poliza driving in his vehicle toward the beach, he galloped after him, joyful and curious, clearly wanting to make his personal acquaintance. However, considering the rhino’s body proportions—nearly two tons and a long horn from his nose and, above all, his innates, extreme short-sightedness, the situation was not completely free of danger. Poliza cautiously crawled on hands and knees, nearing the colossal splashing around happily in the water, and from the courageous distance of eight feet even- tually pulled out his camera and wide-angle lens. The rhino’s phenomenal trust proved to be its demise, however. In Asia the rhinoceros horns is still reputed to have a magical aphrodisiac effect and the Chinese market pays horrendous prices for it. This animal was one of the many to be killed, or rather poisoned, by poachers. The rhino is thus now an endangered species.

Quick Decisions

Michael Poliza has long been a fan of the desert elephants of Namibia. He calls them “true masters of survival” and describes how they dig holes up to seven feet deep with their hooves in order to drink from underground water sources they locate in the middle of the desert using their “sixth sense.” Poliza has always been especially impressed by the way these creatures, which nourish themselves on branches, leaves and greenery, manage to live in desert river beds and occasionally tramp across the endless sand dunes. He had always wanted to photograph one of these elephant caravans through the desert from the air—in other words, while truly out on the open plain.

For this reason, during the Namib New Year Safari 2005–06, Poliza boarded an ultra-lightcraft every morning at 6 a.m. to seek out the elephants. And on the very morning he was due to return to Cape Town, he spied a herd marching off in the direction of the open plain. A quick decision was required. Should he take off and already waiting on the runway to take him home? Or should he drop everything and devote himself to the elephants that were migrating as if they had been ordered to do so? Naturally Poliza decided to let his safari mates return to
Colin Bell is a genuine pioneer of the African safari industry. He is a true conservationist at heart and had made his belief a fundamental part of Wilderness Safaris’ business strategy. His camps redefined the safari experience and in years of enormous growth he brought the company to over 50 camps and lodges. But doing so and making a major contribution to protect the fragile wilderness areas and integrating the local communities made his company so unique. He has accepted many of the world’s most recognized environmental awards on behalf of his great team before he decided to move on to new ventures in early 2006.

Cape Town without him. So he got back into the ultra-light aircraft and grabbed this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity by the horns. The sun was rising at just the right angle through the morning mist, painting the eternal sands with shadows and light, while the elephants in the hard trotted along per- forming one of the most extraordinary of them with its trunk raised to orient the group: “Bingo.”

Each time he makes such a visual conquest, Michael Poliza feels completely fulfilled. That is why he has dedicated him- self, body and soul, to this kind of photo-hunting—regardless of the consequences. Of course, he is already planning his next trips and expeditions; these are not increasingly diffi- cult athletic feats done for the sake of achievement, but rather journeys of visual discovery and adventure designed to simply give him, and ultimately us, pleasure. His latest activities can always be tracked at: www.michaelpoliza.com

On that first safari, I arranged for Michael Poliza and some of his crew to visit the Okavango Delta in Botswana. Instantly he fell under the spell of this wonderful country, its wildlife and people. The connection was made, Michael came to see me in my office a few years later after he fin- ished the project and we started on a journey of discovery together. I was bringing him to some of the planet’s wildest and most intriguing wildlife areas—and he was easing us techno-dinosaurs into the world of digital photography and technology, and into his unique way of photography.

Michael changed our lives. Under his inspiration, we took the plunge. We sold ALL our slide film cameras and went totally digital, long before it became acceptable and fash- ionable. In those early days, all the safari companies and photographic funds were not recognizing digital photogra- phy’s value and what it could do to change our lives and improve our imagery. As a result of moving into digital pho- tography very early, Wilderness Safaris was able to leapfrog our photography and our business into new levels of excel- lence not seen before in the safari industry at that time. Now, everyone is into digital and it seems strange to reflect back on those early digital days and wonder what all the reluctance was about.

Michael became part of our lives at Wilderness Safaris as he fell under the captivating spell of Africa. He packed his bags and made Cape Town the base of his excursions into Africa, spending lots of time in Botswana, Namibia, and ven- turing into Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Kenya a bit later in his time down here.

Michael brought a new perspective into wildlife photogra- phy. He managed to photograph many animals in a way that was departing from the general rules of wildlife photog- raphy. He is able to portray the Lion king in his full pride and dignity in a close-up without showing his eyes (pages 38/39). All the essence of this majestic character was caught in this beautiful photograph, yet he broke the rules and did not show the eyes.

He captured the essence of these wonderful areas and amazing wildlife in his very own style. He brought a new, more artistic view into wildlife photography. Many of his images portray an animal in a way that I had never seen before. A different angle, extremely close or very graphical, often waiting for hours and days to get that special shot. And he was never getting tired of trying and trying again, believing that there is always a better shot out there.

Michael has inspired many of our guides, staff and guests to become better photographers. He often shared his knowledge with any one that was genuinely interested, happy to give a few secrets away, rather than being all ter- ritorial and competitive.

And he has challenged us as a company to go further and better. When we needed help to guide and educate our guests and staff, he jumped in and helped with gusto. When North Island in the Seychelles needed help to lift the standards, Michael dove in, boots and all, and relocated up there to run the project.

What else can I say about Michael? I think the images in this book show the enormous amount of the passion and dedication Michael has to bring out the best there is on this planet and to show it to everyone he comes into contact with.

Have a look yourselves.

Uta Gruenberger lives in Vienna and is a freelance writer. She is a regular contributor to such magazines and newspa- pers as Park Avenue, Geist and Süddeutsche Zeitung. As a camera woman and director, she also makes documentaries and “making-of” movies.

Uta Gruenberger reads Michael Poliza's book and is impressed by his dedication to wildlife photography.

Pioneer of Digital Wildlife Photography

In 2000 I started to get emails from a vessel called “STARSHIP” that was cruising the world on a three year environmental awareness expedition saying that it was coming into Southern African waters shortly and that someone of the crew would like to visit some of the best wildlife areas in southern Africa. It was an unusual message to receive in those early days of emails in that the message was being sent by a small ship far out at sea. The email pointed me to the ship’s website at www.ms-starship.com. I logged on out of curiosity to try and find out more about these adven- turers and what they were up to. That’s where our journey together started. These fellows were pursuing their dream and were travelling around the world visiting all the remote and out of the way places, often bringing and donating much needed equipment to the scientists who were work- ing in these remote locations.

On our photography and our business into new levels of excel- lence not seen before in the safari industry at that time. Now, everyone is into digital and it seems strange to reflect back on those early digital days and wonder what all the reluctance was about.

Michael became part of our lives at Wilderness Safaris as he fell under the captivating spell of Africa. He packed his bags and made Cape Town the base of his excursions into Africa, spending lots of time in Botswana, Namibia, and ven- turing into Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Kenya a bit later in his time down here.

Michael brought a new perspective into wildlife photogra- phy. He managed to photograph many animals in a way that was departing from the general rules of wildlife photog- raphy. He is able to portray the Lion king in his full pride and dignity in a close-up without showing his eyes (pages 38/39). All the essence of this majestic character was caught in this beautiful photograph, yet he broke the rules and did not show the eyes.

He captured the essence of these wonderful areas and amazing wildlife in his very own style. He brought a new, more artistic view into wildlife photography. Many of his images portray an animal in a way that I had never seen before. A different angle, extremely close or very graphical, often waiting for hours and days to get that special shot. And he was never getting tired of trying and trying again, believing that there is always a better shot out there.

Michael has inspired many of our guides, staff and guests to become better photographers. He often shared his knowledge with any one that was genuinely interested, happy to give a few secrets away, rather than being all ter- ritorial and competitive.

And he has challenged us as a company to go further and better. When we needed help to guide and educate our guests and staff, he jumped in and helped with gusto. When North Island in the Seychelles needed help to lift the standards, Michael dove in, boots and all, and relocated up there to run the project.

What else can I say about Michael? I think the images in this book show the enormous amount of the passion and dedication Michael has to bring out the best there is on this planet and to show it to everyone he comes into contact with.

Have a look yourselves.

Uta Gruenberger reads Michael Poliza's book and is impressed by his dedication to wildlife photography.

Pioneer of Digital Wildlife Photography

In 2000 I started to get emails from a vessel called “STARSHIP” that was cruising the world on a three year environmental awareness expedition saying that it was coming into Southern African waters shortly and that someone of the crew would like to visit some of the best wildlife areas in southern Africa. It was an unusual message to receive in those early days of emails in that the message was being sent by a small ship far out at sea. The email pointed me to the ship’s website at www.ms-starship.com. I logged on out of curiosity to try and find out more about these adven- turers and what they were up to. That’s where our journey together started. These fellows were pursuing their dream...