

Joachim Schmeisser is from Germany and has been practising photography since the age of 12. He has worked for several campaigns for beauty and fashion magazines, and is currently involved in making portraits and reportage photography from various travels in Asia, Africa and the United States of America.



Orphan Elephants

Joachim Schmeisser documents his encounters with gentle giants, the orphan elephants of a wildlife trust in Nairobi.

Nairobi, Kenya, is home to 'The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust', a unique sanctuary and orphanage. Started by legendary conservationist David Sheldrick, it is dedicated to the preservation of Africa's wilderness, specifically elephants. Elephants are fascinating animals. Their existence on our planet is millions of years old. Unfortunately, their habitat and survival are endangered today.

Most of the elephants who live in this sanctuary have become orphans due to the effects of poaching. Over here, they are reared by individual keepers, till they are



Body contact is important for growing elephants, as it gives them a sense of comfort and belonging.

The elephants have a great time rolling around in a mud bath during the midday heat. This is one of their favourite activities.

confident and old enough to be let out in the wild.

The sanctuary also hosts an Orphan's Project, where one can 'adopt' one of these elephants. This basically means that a person is responsible for the wellbeing of an assigned elephant through the means of donations. A friend of mine gifted my son the guardianship for one of these orphan elephants. This is how I came across these gentle giants and started making photographs of these wonderful creatures.

When I decided to undertake this project, I chose to frame these elephants in their natural element. As sensitive and stoic they are in their demeanour, they can be extremely playful too. They would often enjoy themselves during their mud baths, and would roll around in the ground and cover themselves liberally with dust.

Orphans of all ages are found in this sanctuary. In fact, the youngest elephant I have photographed was only three weeks old. A lot of my photographs were made when the elephants would play with

each other. However, I would also try to portray them during their quiet moments—when they would isolate themselves from the herd and stand in sombre silence.

This project has been an unforgettable experience, and has left me as a huge fan of these animals. Not just that, I have gained profound respect for 'The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust', who do an amazing job at caring for these marvels of nature. 

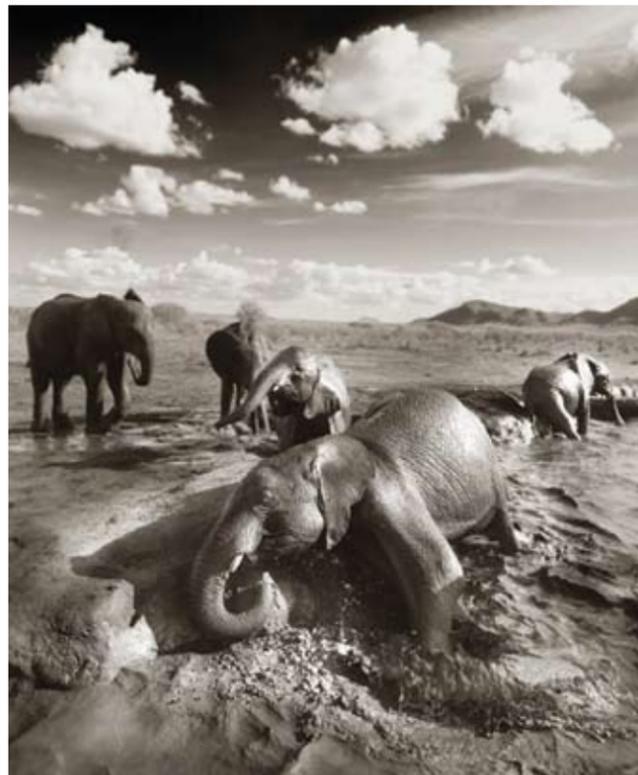
All elephants at the sanctuary have a keeper assigned to them, who takes care of the herd.





These elephants form strong familial bonds, and often travel in herds. Here, they walk back to their nursery.

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Elephants in the wild are protective of their herd, but the ones in this sanctuary are used to human presence, and let me shoot from up close.

Contrary to popular belief, an elephant's hide is very sensitive. Two orphan elephants dust each other after their mud baths to protect their skin.



Photographing Animals in Their Element

Each elephant consumes gallons of milk everyday, which they drink several times during the day.

- While approaching the animal, make sure you do not threaten it in any form whatsoever. If you feel the animal is nervous, step back and make the pictures at another point of time.
- Choose to frame the intricacies of the animal's body. For instance, frame the wrinkles on the hide of an elephant, or capture a zebra's stripes.

One of the calves enjoys a quiet moment, away from the hustle and bustle of the herd.



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