

Andy Rouse's Shots of the Month

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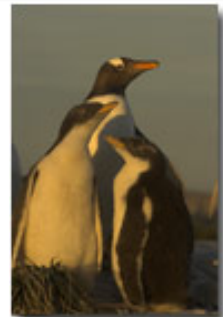
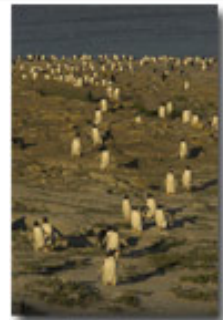
Firstly I'd like to say a big thank you to the NPN community for your support with the release of [RawShooter Essentials 2005](#). The response for us has been fantastic, with 20,000 users registered in the first week and the press very interested to talk to us at PMA. Sure we have a few issues with the product but hopefully they'll be fixed by the time that you read this. Anyway just wanted to say thanks for the message of support, it shows that I've chosen the right web community to write for!

Now to this month's article. Penguins. Yep, but not penguins on ice. Huh, am I mad? Nope, you see a large proportion of the penguins' home range falls outside of the permanent ice cap of Antarctica. One such location for them is the Falkland Islands in the South Atlantic Ocean. This British Colony is home to large populations of King, Gentoo, Rockhopper and Jackass Penguins, mostly on wild sandy beaches amid spectacular scenery. In January this year I spent nearly three weeks on the Falklands and I have to say that is was one of the most special experiences of my life. The past few months have been hectic for me with the RawShooter project and I really needed a break without any communication with the outside world. Staying on a remote island, 10 miles from the nearest human, and with only the local wildlife for company was just the tonic I needed.

My cabin was next to a Gentoo Penguin colony and I set about working out their habits. First thing in the morning they'd leave the colony and waddle down to the beach about a mile away. They walk really funny, I mean really funny, like John Wayne with a holster on each hip. Eventually they'd get to the water and leave for a day's fishing, only starting to return in the early evening. I decided quickly to spend my time on the beach with them as they came in after fishing, and also working with the youngsters in the colonies. I was on the beach each day by 5:00 PM but this was no sun drenched holiday; the wind was cutting and I always needed a fleece to cut down its effect.

The Gentoo Penguins had the coolest landing technique of any penguin species that I have seen. Firstly would they hang around a few hundred metres off shore, checking to see if any predators were lurking in the shallows or on the beach. This includes humans laying on beach towels wearing Gore-Tex, so I was forced to sit upright so that they recognized me as human. Safety awareness satisfied, they'd porpoise in, jumping through the waves until they reached the shallows some 5 metres out. Then they'd swim effortlessly underwater, back and forth in front of me, until a large wave started to break. At that point they'd leap through it and onto the beach – spectacular! There can be only one reason for their landing behaviour, they were enjoying it! So many times I saw them dart back and forth through waves, if they were desperate to land then they'd have come straight in. Once on the beach they gathered up and chilled out together before the long march to the colony.

To see penguins surfing is a truly awesome experience. The classic image of course, this month's [NPN cover](#), was taken one afternoon on a windy day that had really whipped up the waves. As the sun was bright I decided to use the LCD histogram to set the exposure to a bell curve slightly to the left of centre. Setting the aperture to f5.6, I took several test shots and decided that 1/2000th sec. offered the best exposure. There was no room here for any "arty" exposures, the shot would be to get the penguin frozen in motion surrounded by high action water. As I've said previously the penguins would swim back and forth in the shallows, which would give me time to lock my autofocus onto them. I knew from experience to just pick one and follow it all the way in and I would be more tuned in getting the killer shot. On one occasion the Gentoo that I tracked misjudged the landing and ended up on it's backside, with a suitable embarrassed look on its beak (check out the [slideshow image](#)). Proof that even the best don't always get it right.



One evening the wind was so powerful that it generated a sandstorm, which was a fantastic opportunity for moody shots. The only problem of course was that I'd have to get right down into the storm and shoot low to create the effect of the storm. I placed the camera inside two plastic zip-lock bags for protection and gingerly laid down; I was immediately battered by the wind and within minutes had sand in every orifice. And I mean EVERY orifice. Still the penguins looked great, when I could free the viewfinder and my eyes of sand to see them. They clearly hated the sand and it must have been exhausting struggling uphill against it when they were already knackered from a hard day's fishing. But struggle they did, onward and upward, eventually making it past the beach to the shelter of the slopes. I spent a total of three hours in the storm and it cost me dear. My brand new 1Ds MK2 never worked the same after that, with several buttons sticking and the menu only displaying intermittently. As soon as I got home it was repaired by Canon, their only comment was to note that a pile of sand came out the camera when they opened it. Still at least it was tough enough to survive this test, which is all I can demand of any camera.

Spending time inside the colonies was a really moving experience. I'd crawl up slowly to them and initially the Gentoos would back off a little. So I'd just stop, put my head down and think like a flat stone. After a few minutes several adult penguins would come waddling up and stand just a few inches from me. Soon they would be joined by the youngsters and after 10 minutes I'd be surrounded and part of the colony. I just loved it; every few minutes one of the adults would trumpet loudly, sometimes two at a time, so there was always something going on. Photographically it was great, I could shoot with mainly a wide angle and get some nice group shots; attaching a circular polarizer gave me some saturated skies if a few small problems with exposure. I had to be ever watchful though, as soon as a penguin turned its back I knew what was coming and had to shift to avoid the white stuff. Believe me they can reach several feet. The youngsters had a charming habit of regurgitating fresh red squid too, which stayed on my coat all the way home. When I left the island several locals commented on my smell and the local dogs seemed unusually interested in following me around. In fact, laying in indescribable muck each day, my coat travelled home in a separate bag from everything else. Once home we went straight to the car wash and jet washed it for over 20 minutes before even thinking of washing it. Man, it smelt like nothing you could believe!

I left the colonies with some sadness as Gentoos have a way of growing on you. But I was in the Falklands to do a job and other challenges awaited me. Next month I'll show you some beautiful King Penguin shots from the trip, some majestic albatross and a Rockhopper penguin having a shower. Until then adios amigos!

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Andy Rouse is a professional wildlife photographer based in the U.K. His professional credits include hosting the Discovery Channel's Wildlife Photographer TV series, and the publication of six books, including his soon-to-be-released *The DSLR Masterclass*. Andy's images are represented by NHPA and Getty Images and are sold worldwide. To learn more about Andy, check out his [NPN bio](#). To view more of Andy's work, visit his website at www.andyrouse.co.uk.

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