



Destination

The Rock Garden, Duqm

Shaped by wind,
water and other
natural forces,
the limestone and
sandstone rocks
provide a sublime
backdrop for the
local habitat, finds
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HeAs regular readers will know, I enjoy travelling the country capturing landscapes and the spectacular scenery of Oman. Usually my subjects are inanimate objects. This time, however, I have tackled the altogether more challenging area of wildlife photography.

Taking photographs of wildlife is one of the most difficult to master. You need a lot of things. First of all, knowledge about the species you want to photograph is vital. Then you have to research the conditions in which you will be working, often requiring heavy and expensive equipment.

The most important things, however, are patience and time.

And adaptability – you never know what can happen in the shooting zone.

Because of this, the best wildlife photographers on the world command a lot respect among their contemporaries. For instance, American Michael ‘Nick’ Nichols, an award-winning expert dubbed ‘The Indiana Jones of Photography’ whose work has taken him to the most remote corners of the world, and Frans Lanting, a Dutch photographer, both work for, and their work published in, the influential National Geographic magazine.

Here in Oman, wildlife photography is not easy. Only a few species can survive the barren land and harsh conditions of the deserts. Those that do flourish in such a climate are often hard to track down.

My best hunting grounds for wildlife photography have been the bird sanctuary at the Hikman peninsula, where flamingos with pink-tipped wings gather, and Masirah Island, a hatching ground for loggerhead sea turtles.

Recently, I had the opportunity try somewhere different. During a trip to the southern part of the Al Wusta region, we stopped off in Duqm. A few kilometres from the centre is the Rock Garden. I have visited this a few times before and always been fascinated by the moonscape-like scenery made by the limestone and sandstone rocks formations. The site is one of the top 25 sites of geological importance in the country, giving visitors an impressive insight into the wonders of the planet.

This time, the weather and light was not perfect for landscape photography. As I walked with a couple of friends around some unusual shaped rocks, we saw a few lizards in the shade.

They seemed timid and approaching without scaring them off, proved a lesson in patience.

I tried using a long lens to take photographs from a safe distance but the result was not as interesting as I’d hoped.

After half an hour, one of my friends called out that he had found a small lizard, an Agama, sitting on top of a big brown rock. Unlike his fellow lizards, this one seemed unperturbed by our presence and sat surveying our movements. I took some shots from around three metres away but, again, the results were not what I wanted. Not wanting to miss this chance, I went back to my car for another lens. When I got back, the lizard had changed position and was much closer to me. Very slowly, I moved in. The little Agama, a long-tailed, insect-eating lizard, stood his ground and appeared not in the least bit afraid of this strange large object moving towards it with a camera in hand.

As I approached, I continued taking photos and then began to slowly reduce the distance. The lizard very proudly posed for photographs. Even when I changed the lens again for close-up shots, he remained in place. He obviously liked the publicity! I managed to get some amazing, sharp pictures from only 10 cm away. When we had finished and got back into our cards, the lizard remained atop his rock, watching us and surveying the land around him, like the ‘Duke of Duqm’ and ruler of the Rock Garden. ■



TRAVEL GUIDE

Just follow the same route that I’ve been travelling constantly since 2007. Take Road 32 from Muscat to Duqm. Total distance is around 550km, around a seven-hour drive. A 4x4 is not absolutely necessary. You can park your saloon car on the gravel track and go the Rock Garden on foot, a walk of only around 300m.