

John Cooper

takes a shot at introduced species



John made the switch to digital cameras in 2004. His tool of choice is a Canon Eos 5D or 7D.

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by senior correspondent Jennifer Martens

Few of us have the patience, the means or the opportunity to get close enough to see the minute detail of a rainbow bee-eater, a hoary-headed grebe or a jewel bug like Australian photographer John Cooper.

For the past 24 years, John has been capturing the antics of various Australian creatures and the majesty of a myriad of landscapes here and throughout the world. He has always had an interest in nature, but his interest in photography didn't surface until he attended a nature photography seminar in 1984. "I was hooked immediately," said the Sydney native. His interest was such that later that evening, he purchased all the equipment he would need to pursue what has become more than a just a weekend hobby. He even took an early retirement from a career in pathology in 1999 to further pursue his passion.

Four decades ago, John's 'shooting' was done with a .222-calibre rifle fitted with a Bushnell scope. "I used to cull roos on a very large property in Narrendera, New South Wales," said the father of three. "But now, photography takes up too much of my time."

John shunned digital cameras for many years, but in 2004, technology finally

caught up with him and he now uses either a Canon Eos 5D or 7D fitted with lenses ranging from 17 to 400mm. About 90 per cent of his photos are taken using a tripod to ensure a steady shot and all are shot in the RAW mode and processed using Photoshop CS4 software.

In order to get the shot he wants, time is something John has to have. When photographing birds, he will often wait up to three or four hours for the perfect opportunity. In the days leading up to a session, John will gradually introduce a hide, which he has made, so to not agitate his subject. Often, the hide is camouflaged, but usually, that is so he can go somewhat unnoticed by nosy passersby. While attempting to capture a wedge-tail eagle dropping its prey into its nest in Cobar, New South Wales, in 1996, John waited nine hours before the opportunity presented itself. "That was quite unusual," he said; as was the time he climbed a 20ft tower in the middle of the night to photograph a tawny frogmouth owl.

Native vs introduced species

Photography has given John a unique insight into the destruction introduced species such as foxes, cats, pigs and dogs can do to our native wildlife. Not only has

he seen a decline in certain species, he has frequently seen the damage first-hand. He recalls a number of times when he has set up a hide near a nest only to return later to see that it had been destroyed by a cat. "The effects are devastating," he said.

SSAA National's response

SSAA National shares John's view. Conservation has long been a priority of the Association, so much so that the SSAA has won national recognition for its participation in the control of problem species in both national parks and on pastoral lands throughout Australia. The SSAA owns several large tracts of land with a view to preserving a number of endangered species. The Flinders Ranges in South Australia is home to one such piece of real estate, the Bunkers Conservation Park, which runs the highly successful Operation Bounceback - a program designed to control feral goats and re-establish the endangered yellow-footed rock wallaby population.

The plight of Australia's native species has become such that the SSAA believes that no single approach, whether it be shooting, poisoning or trapping, alone can successfully tackle the problem.

Be Part of the Solution is a campaign that

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SSAA National has launched in response to Australia's problems with largely unmanaged introduced species. To launch the campaign, billboards and telephone box posters were positioned in Melbourne and the Canberra Airport. The photo used to attract the public's attention is of a wily fox with a galah in its mouth- and it was taken by John Cooper.


John was pleased when the SSAA contacted him about using his photo as a part of its national campaign. As a former sporting shooter himself, he believes that hunters play a major role in managing Australia's introduced species. He hopes the campaign, and his photo in particular, will enlighten the public to the problems certain introduced species cause for our native wildlife and encourage people to support programs like the SSAA.

SSAA National President Bob Green said that SSAA members are all aware of the "impacts of introduced species such as rabbits, foxes, feral goats and pigs, but unfortunately, a large number of the city-based public are unaware of the real costs of these introduced species." New studies have estimated that the economic effects of the most damaging introduced species alone are in excess of \$740 million per year. Sadly, the real cost to Australia is the potential loss of entire species of small terrestrial animals or birds and that is a hefty price to pay for apathy.


Getting the shot

"The fox in the photo was a frequent visitor on a friend's property," said John. The truth is that it was an uninvited guest. Although John's mate no longer raises wild turkeys and he does not have lambs on his property, a number of neighbouring farms abound with farmlife and the fox was a constant nightmare for those property owners.

In the lead-up to taking the photo, John and his mate spent a week luring the fox by baiting the area with cheese and meat, each night moving the bait closer to the farmhouse. On the night of the shot, John and his



Sometimes, John has to go to extreme lengths to get a shot. Here, he set up a 20ft hide in order to snap a tawny frogmouth owl.



The photo that was selected for the Melbourne telephone box posters. In the lead-up to taking this photo, John and his mate spent a week luring the fox by baiting the area.

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friend had buried roadkill just metres from the farmhouse window and waited. Less than two hours later, the fox predictably made its way to the bait and the two patient photographers were able to capture the sneaky villain's actions. Four days later, John learned that the fox had been shot by a neighbour who had grown tired of the miscreant.

John's photographic talents have earned him more than 600 international awards. In 1996, and again in 1997, he was ranked first in the world as the most successful international exhibitor in the Nature Print sections. His work has been featured in a number of prominent magazines including *Australian Geographic*, *Geo Australasia*, *Australian Photography* and *Gardens and Outdoor Living*. It has also been displayed in the Museum Victoria and by the Australian Conservation Foundation. And now, thanks to the SSAA, John's credentials include billboards and posters throughout Melbourne and Canberra Airport.

For more information about John Cooper or to view or purchase a selection of his work, visit www.johncooperphoto.com

For information on how you can help Australia's native wildlife and be part of the solution, visit www.ssaa.org.au ●



The photo that was selected for the Canberra Airport billboard.

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