

NANPA'S 2007 OUTSTANDING PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR



# LIVING

PHOTOGRAPHY AND TEXT BY

# LIGHT

KEVIN SCHAFER

## I NEVER EXPECTED TO BECOME A PHOTOGRAPHER.

As a boy I dreamed of other things: of being an underwater archaeologist, a park ranger, a Shakespearean actor. Taking pictures, meanwhile, was never more than a hobby—persistently enjoyable, but quite possibly frivolous. I never thought it would amount to much. To my enormous surprise, it became my life's work.

For nearly thirty years now, I have pursued a career that I could never have imagined, nor thought possible when I started out. Over the course of those years, I have been privileged to sit beside mountain gorillas in the cloud forests of Africa, listen to the eerie trills of Weddell seals beneath the Antarctic ice, and slip into the water next to whales five hundred times my size. In the company of each, I have felt a profound and incredible pleasure, and a deep connection to the natural world that has both inspired and sustained me.

My formal training in geology and biology only deepened that connection and informed my work both as a photographer and writer. This exposure to scientific thought also encouraged me to think beyond capturing just appealing portraits, and to look deeper into the lives of my subjects.

For me the most satisfying images are those that not only reveal an animal's face or character, but tell its story. It may be the protective behavior of a mother whale towards her calf, or the astonishing ability of seabirds to navigate across an untracked ocean. These are all facets of the singular pageant of life on this planet, to which I will always feel fortunate to bear witness.

Although I consider myself primarily a wildlife photographer, I also shoot other subjects as well—flowers, trees, landscapes, even a few stones. I do this, in part, to leaven the visual mixture, but also out of a firm belief that animals do not live in a vacuum. The world they inhabit is wild, colorful, extravagantly diverse and irreplaceable.

But their world is our world, too, for which we bear the ultimate responsibility. And if we are judged to have lived up to our great promise as a species—the heirs of Mozart and Shakespeare, among so many others—it will be because we have taken seriously the careful stewardship of this planet, and of the creatures who share it with us.



BELOW: *Their pleated throats filled with water and fish, a pod of humpback whales gorge themselves on vast shoals of herring in Southeast Alaska. They burst out of the water just yards from my boat.*

OPPOSITE: *A wandering albatross, sitting on its nest, seems unperturbed by a mid-summer snowstorm on remote South Georgia Island. These endangered birds are threatened by long-line fishing throughout the Southern Ocean.*

PREVIOUS PAGES, BACKGROUND: *Meltwater pours off the eroded face of a tidewater glacier in the arctic island archipelago of Svalbard, a territory of Norway. I was captivated by the striking contrast between flowing water and sculpted ice.*

RIGHT, TOP: *Spring in the Ho Rainforest of Olympic National Park, Washington, is a celebration of green. It can be challenging to find a composition in this chaos of vines and leaves.*

RIGHT, BELOW: *Fragile icicles decorate a crevasse inside an Antarctic iceber. Light passing through the ice bathed the scene in subtle shades of blue and lilac.*





LEFT: *Having just emerged from the sea, a gentoo penguin scratches its head—an elegant trick for a bird without hands or knees.*

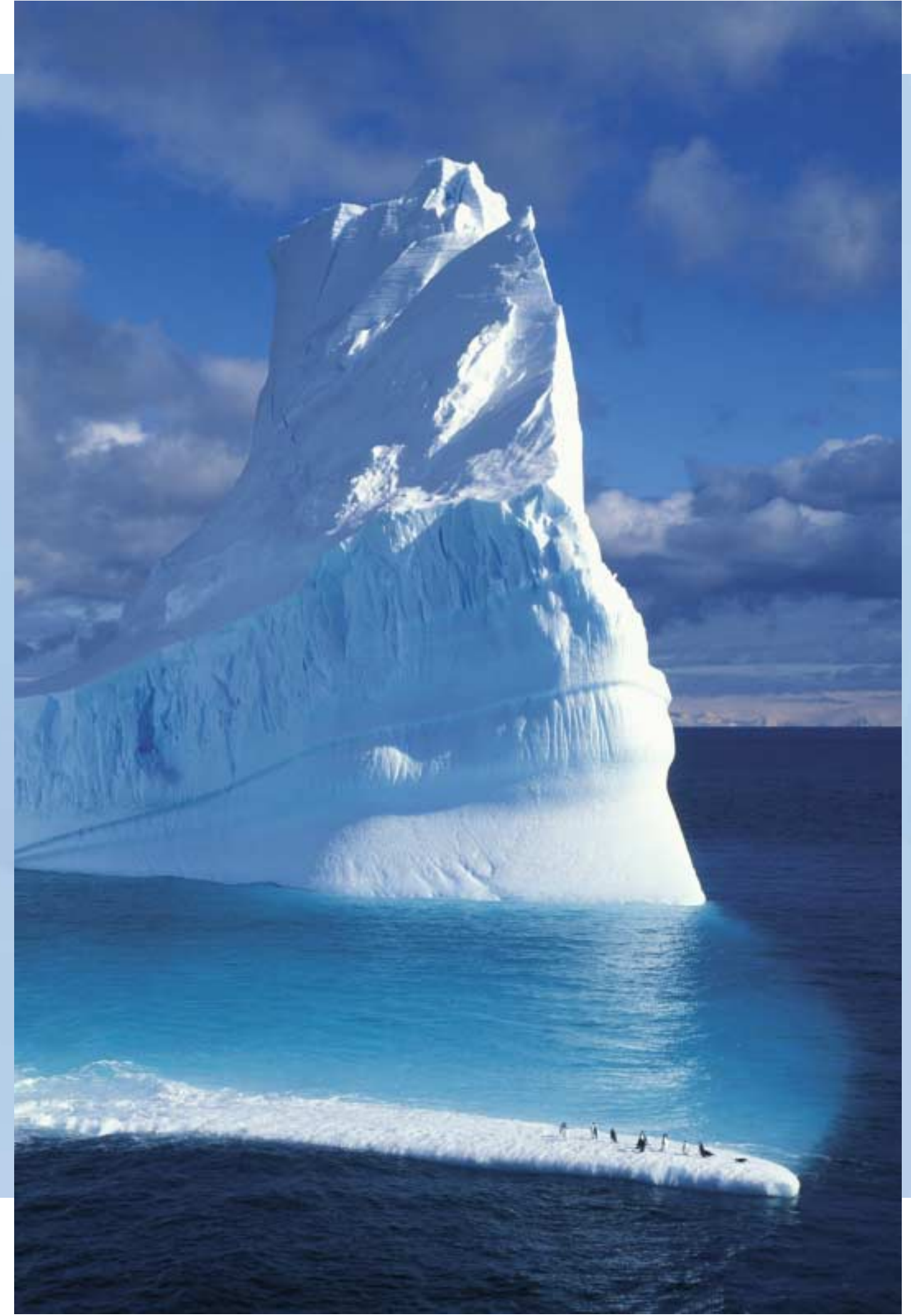
BELOW: *Penguins are utterly at home in the sea. These curious king penguins gathered around my underwater camera as soon as I lowered it over the side of the boat.*

OPPOSITE: *A cluster of penguins rests on the edge of a towering iceberg near Palmer Station, Antarctica. Penguins have always been one of my favorite subjects.*



#### PHOTOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT

*Some of these images were taken with a Nikon F100 body and Fujichrome slide film, my standard combination for most of my career. In the past year, however, I have switched full-time to digital photography, and now use a Nikon D2X and an immensely heavy assortment of lenses. For my digital work, I rely on Adobe® Photoshop® and Macintosh computers. All of the underwater pictures were made with a Nikonos V.*





ABOVE: *As approaching dawn brightens the sky above lonely Ascension Island, a female green turtle hurls sand to hide the eggs she has just laid.*

RIGHT: *After a storm, these rockhopper penguins rode the heavy surf in to their colony in the Falkland Islands.*

BELOW: *In the Pantanal wetlands of Brazil, a curious giant otter rises up to investigate an approaching photographer.*





LEFT: *Threatened by a spreading grass fire in Kenya, this lioness carefully moved each of her five tiny cubs to a new den.*

RIGHT: *The setting sun fills the sky with color along Washington's wilderness coast, one of the most dramatic meetings of land and sea anywhere on Earth.*

I once had a workshop student arrive on the first day of class with an ancient, hand-me-down, manual-focus camera and a couple of beaten-up lenses. His fellow students, by contrast, had the latest everything: the newest camera models, dozens of lenses, and just about every toy you can find in the back pages of a photo magazine. It should come to no surprise when I tell you that it was the first student's pictures that proved the most exciting of the entire class—filled with unusual perspectives, subtle compositions, and a great sensitivity for light.

I tell this story because it confirms what I have always believed about photography, that it has less to do with equipment than it does with seeing. A skilled photographer should be able to make captivating pictures with a primitive box camera, while one with less vision would not be helped by the most expensive camera.

Having said that, photography is ultimately dependent on technology, one that continues to evolve with dizzying speed. I am grateful for each new development as I continue my quest to capture the living light.



*Kevin Schafer was chosen as the North American Nature Photography Association's Outstanding Photographer of the Year for 2007. Schafer's new book Living Light (published in 2006 by Bitterroot Press) is available online at [www.kevinschafer.com](http://www.kevinschafer.com).*

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