

WILD-GAME PHOTOGRAPHY

By Sumner W. Matteson



A Herd of Elk at Jackson's Hole

It generally is conceded that the path of the hunter is strewn with difficulties, but the hindrances and obstacles that he meets do not compare with those in the way of the wild-game photographer, nor are his patience, perseverance, skill and presence of mind called into play to so great a degree as are those of the man who pictures wild animals on the sensitized plate. Having once secured the possibility of a telling shot, to bring down the creatures of the forest means only to elevate the sight and pull the trigger—a modern gun performing its fatal execution at a distance of more than five hundred yards.

But with the camera it is an entirely different performance. In the first place, if an ordinary lens is used, the photographer must approach to within five or ten yards of his subject, and within twenty or thirty yards with a long focus or telephoto, the latter further requiring time exposure and the handling of an awkward, twenty-four-inch bellows. Then, after crawling for possibly two hundred yards or more under cover and against the breeze, and gaining a good, close-range view of his quarry, he must consider the focal distance, the light and the motion of the animal, and regulate the scale, diaphragm and speed accordingly.

All of these adjustments in readiness, the question rises how to make the exposure without detection. Even if no mistakes have been made up to this point, the photographer is not sure of ultimate success, as the hunter is with his first shot and the falling of his game to the ground. There are numerous possibilities of accident or neglect. The lens may have jarred loose, and thus be out of focus; the lens-cap or slide may not have been removed; the shutter might be out of order or remain unset; there possibly may be a leak in the bellows or in the plate-holder; the plate may be defective; or there may be a double exposure. Indeed, a dozen other conditions, to which we might add accidents on the road or in the dark-room or during the less hazardous process of printing, might arise to ruin the negative, all of which lead "knowing ones" to admit that it is more credit to secure a single photograph of wild game than to slaughter a whole herd of animals.

The methods employed by the few successful wild-game photographers differ materially, according to localities, the special habits of the animals and the individual judgment of the man at the camera. A. G. Wallihan, a pioneer in the field, obtained his mountain-lion, bear and bob-cat negatives by treeing the animals with dogs. He secured his antelope pictures in the fall before the early snows afforded liquid refreshment on the



Photograph by S. N. Leek

A Buck at Rest

north hillsides and when the watering-places were scarce and not easily located. Ambushing his instruments with brush and grass, and secreting himself in a trench twenty-five or fifty feet distant, he would lie in wait for hours and even days, scarcely daring to move lest at that moment the game would approach. For all his watching, his patience might be rewarded only by the tantalizing sight of the game just outside the scope of the camera or beyond the focal distance. Or he may have calculated upon one-twenty-fifth of a second's exposure, whereas, though in field and focus, the animals might be in motion, requiring an instantaneous exposure.

To work from a distance with a long air-tube does

not alleviate these conditions or adapt the camera to the special needs, since the exposure may be made only at the moment deemed by the operator to be the most propitious. The next instant the ideal situation may present itself when it is too late, and the shutter having been released there is nothing left for the photographer to do except to guess at the results and to sigh for what might have been. This so-called "still-hunting" is practised often by the Indians of the desert sections, who have the patience to endure long, tedious, unfruitful waits, and the hunting implements that require short-range execution.

In photographing

black-tail deer, Mr. Wallihan seeks out the well-defined trails leading between their summer ranges in the mountains of Northern Colorado and their winter retreats in the sand-hills extending across the line into Utah. Early in October, hundreds and thousands of deer make their annual pilgrimage along these trails, and are constantly under fire of pot-hunters. Fearing to advance, they travel under cover of the night or early morning, and sometimes are half-concealed by being driven on ahead of storms. These conditions, it will be seen, render a camera almost useless. For, although with binoculars a band might be sighted along a distant trail, now loitering and feeding in sheltered places, now hurrying across the open, exposed parks, there is little chance of a successful snap.

They approach nearer and nearer, at times disappearing entirely from view, and then again reappearing, until at length the bleating of fawns or a chance dislodged stone as it rolls down the mountainside may be distinctly heard. The light may be moderately good, and in another instant they are photographically yours, when lo! without warning the crack of a rifle pierces the air. There is a moment's pause, then a scramble, and in a twinkling the deer have disappeared as if by magic. The long, expectant wait has been in vain. The opportunity is gone; and the seeming collapse of nerves at the moment of defeat tells the tale of terrific strain under which the photographer has labored at this exciting time.

A railroad is now being built through this game country, and Mr. Wallihan, recognizing that this innovation means the death-knell of the rapidly diminishing herds of deer and other animals, has laid aside his camera. His advancing age also is a handicap in the pursuit of wild-game photography, and he has decided to change his occupation to commercial lines.

One of the most prominent wild-game photo-

graphers, and the only one who has employed successfully the flashlight for this purpose, is George Shiras of Pittsburg. For many years, Mr. Shiras' summer outings have been spent in Northern Michigan, where he has given up his time largely to photographing wild deer at night. With a stereoscopic and a four-by-five camera focused at twenty and twenty-five feet, and arranged beneath a jack-lamp and flash-pan, he has invaded the inlets and swamps of this part of the country, paddling cautiously along the shores against the breeze. Sometimes in company with a skilful guide he thus has explored the haunts of the deer for as long as a week without making a single successful exposure. Arranging his



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Flashlight of an Antelope



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An Antelope Grazing