

INTRODUCTION

When I am in a wilderness area—whether it be forest, savannah, wetlands, or mountains—and especially if I am by myself, I so often experience a sense of awe at the beauty of creation, the sacredness of life. The photographs in this book inspire similar feelings.

The first time I saw Nick Brandt's pictures, I felt emotionally involved. Gazing at some of the images, such as those of the cheetah standing in the fork of an acacia tree, the storks roosting in the upper branches of a grove of trees, and the wildebeest crossing the Mara River, I found I was caught up in the experience of the photographer. It was as though I was sharing that moment when animals and landscape merged into one exquisite whole, the moment when the image was captured.

Nick has focused on the photography of wildlife and the natural world of Africa as an art form. Many of his images have the magnificent composition of a classical landscape painting: the image of hippos gathered near the banks of a river, for example, is reminiscent of a landscape by the nineteenth-century English painter John Constable. And many of his close-ups look as if the animal has agreed to pose for a studio portrait—especially the photographs of the chimpanzees and lions. Yet not only were these animals wild and free, but Nick did not even use a telephoto lens; instead, he relied on his patience and ability to quietly, unobtrusively reveal each subject's true image.

Nick has captured the individuality of his animal subjects—it is almost impossible to look through this book without sensing the personalities of the beings he has photographed. I think I

BY JANE GOODALL

knew from the very beginning that the lives of individual animals mattered and had meaning in the great scheme of things. My forty-five years of learning about and learning from chimpanzees has only strengthened this conviction—as do Nick's photographs. Look at the intelligence and self-awareness that gleams in the eyes of the chimpanzees. Sense the absolute self-confidence of the lions—especially the lioness who gazes out over her hunting grounds, supremely aware of her own power.

Do animals have souls? During my many years alone in the forests of Africa, I felt very close to a great spiritual power. It seemed to be all around. I came to believe that there is a spark of that spiritual power in all living things. With our highly developed intellect and our unique ability to communicate using a sophisticated spoken language, we humans are able to question the meaning of our lives on Earth. I came to believe that the spark of the Great Spirit that I sense in myself is my soul. Looking at some of these photographs reinforces my belief that animals, like us, have souls. Indeed, this whole book brings to mind the worldview of the indigenous people: a spiritual and poetic understanding of the natural world in which animals, nature, and the self are one. I think this is why the photographs arouse such deep emotions—it is unthinkable that such beauty should vanish from the planet.

Yet that is exactly what is happening. Every day vast areas of the natural world fall to bulldozers and chainsaws in the name of progress or corporate greed. The remaining wilderness is constantly being nibbled away due to human population growth,

often by people living in poverty who must raze wilderness areas to grow crops or graze livestock in order to survive; as a result, droughts and floods get worse. Industrialization in its many forms is polluting, poisoning, the Earth, the air, the ground. Our heedless use of fossil fuels is massively contributing to global climate change, causing the ice at the poles to melt. Everywhere people as well as animals are suffering.

And, even as the human species is growing in numbers, other animal species are disappearing. Every day at least one life form becomes extinct—gone forever. Even though the vanished species may be a small, seemingly insignificant creature, areas of wilderness comprise hundreds of diverse forms of life, each one depending on others for its survival. So each loss weakens the whole. We are tearing the net whose interwoven strands support life, as we know it, on Earth.

And it is not just the small creatures and plants that are in danger. Even some of the magnificent creatures portrayed in Nick's

book are threatened with extinction, especially the chimpanzees. And, not only that, animals are subjected to horrid cruelty—in inhumane zoos, in circuses and other forms of entertainment, and in medical research laboratories. They are hunted for “sport,” for food, for their furs. Our exploitation of animals is shocking and endless.

These problems seem huge, but fortunately many groups and individuals are answering the unspoken plea for help. Together we can, indeed must, help prevent further damage and improve the quality of—and respect for—life on Earth.

How tragic it would be if future generations gazed at the heartbreaking beauty of these portraits knowing that they would never see these animals in the wild. Thank you, Nick, for your dedication and talent, your insight and patience. For these photographs, by emphasizing the importance of each living being, will surely inspire others to join our cause and help to stop our senseless destruction of life and beauty before it is too late.