

# SOUTHBURY MAKERS SPOTLIGHT



## James Ward, wildlife photographer, guide, conservationist

By Kelly Keenan, SEDC Arts & Culture Subcommittee  
Photos courtesy of the artist

**Q: How long have you been in Southbury?**

**A:** I have lived in Southbury with my wife, Hollie, and my three daughters, Camryn, Payton, and Reagan, for over 16 years. We love the community and our friends.

**Q: How did you get into wildlife photography, and how long have you been doing it?**

**A:** I started photographing wildlife when I was 15 on my first safari to Tanzania with my family. I fell in love with wildlife and nature with my first steps onto the Serengeti.



**Q: You've been to so many interesting locations. Do you have a favorite subject matter or place to shoot?**

**A:** This is one of the most frequent questions I receive, and up until recently, it was the hardest to answer. I love remote destinations that provide an intimate experience with nature, meaning photographing and viewing wildlife on foot without the barrier of a vehicle. Alaska, Botswana, and the Himalayas in India searching for snow leopards are three of my favorite locations that offer this experience. However, if you told me I could only go to one destination, I would choose Patagonia! The combination of wildlife, conservation, landscape, and culture is unmatched. I have been less than 50 feet from pumas and on beaches with over 200,000 penguins, all on foot. It is one of the wildest and most beautiful landscapes I have visited.



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**Q: Photography has changed a lot over the years. Do you still shoot film, or are you exclusively digital?**

**A:** I started in photography with Nikon cameras and Sigma lenses shooting slides and switched to digital shortly after DSLR's were introduced. When I became more serious about wildlife photography, I upgraded my gear by switching to Sony and their mirrorless cameras and lenses. Each transition has created a better photography experience. For example, early on I would carry 50-100 rolls of slide film with me and manage my shots to ensure I did not run out of film. I would also wait weeks after my return to see my images, many of which would have a scratch through the entire roll caused by dust in the camera from the dry environments I photograph in. Now, I see my images instantly and adjust on the fly to create more dynamic photos. With the switch to mirrorless, my gear is lighter, making it easier, and faster, to travel to the wild and remote locations I typically work in. This new gear is also silent, and less disruptive to the wildlife I am photographing.

**Q: What is your favorite part of the process? Least favorite?**

**A:** I love spending time in nature, but my favorite part is sharing that with my family or friends. My wife and daughters have traveled with me on several occasions to Alaska, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Indonesia. I have been fortunate to have friends accompany me as well. Being away from my family and friends for weeks at a time is the worst part. I spend a lot of time alone, waiting for the opportunity to photograph a specific animal, and almost all my meals are at tables for one.

**Q: Is there a message or take-away from your work that you'd hope to leave the viewer with?**

**A:** While there is nothing that replaces experiencing wildlife and nature in person, I hope to tell the stories of animals and conservation through my photography. I try to capture the emotions and behavior of wildlife so more people learn to appreciate them, which will lead to more efforts to conserve and protect our wild spaces.

**Q: Is there a particular artist or conservationist whose work you admire?**

**A:** I am close friends to two professional photographers, Chris Fallows and Nick Dyer, who have helped me grow as a wildlife photographer. I have learned a lot by photographing with them in different areas of Africa and discussing their approach to photography and their images.



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**Q: Can you share a memorable experience or anecdote from when you were in the field? (for example - something felt surreal, frightening, beautiful...)**

**A:** I have had many amazing experiences with wildlife, from being charged by a rhino and a few elephants, to sitting ten feet from an Alaskan brown bear, but one experience that stands out is a recent experience in Patagonia while tracking pumas in Parque Patagonia in Argentina. My guide and I were looking for a female with three young cubs in the area. We thought we knew which bush they were in when we heard a sound from a bush less than 50 feet away. Suddenly, the female jumped out from the middle of the bush and squared off at us. After recovering from the initial startle, I raised my camera and took a few photos as my guide told me, "There will be time to take photos later". It was time to back away slowly. Once we moved over 100 feet away, the puma laid down and stared at us as we sat down. We patiently waited over three hours to see the cubs come out from the bush to nurse, but to no avail. It was such a surreal, and relaxing moment, that the puma, my guide, and I all fell asleep less than 150 feet away from each other!

**Q: Any other special talents or information you'd like to share with the community?**

**A:** For anyone interested in traveling on safari to Africa, Patagonia, Alaska, India, or any other wildlife destination, I am a partner in a safari company, Safari Professionals ([www.safariprofessionals.com](http://www.safariprofessionals.com)). We specialize in designing tailor-made conservation-based safaris around the world.

**Q: What advice would you offer to emerging artists who are trying to find their voice / style / genre?**

**A:** Be yourself and enjoy it. While it is important to study other artists/photographers in the genre you are interested in, create your own style that fits with what you enjoy or the story you want to tell. The moment you lose track of that, and it becomes a "job", you will lose your passion and your voice.

**James Ward's photography is on display in the Southbury Public Library - Gloria Cachion Gallery from Friday, February 2, through Wednesday, February 28. The artist will be giving a talk on Sunday, February 11 at 1:00pm in the Kingsley Room at Southbury Public Library. Register by going to [Southburylibrary.org](http://Southburylibrary.org).**



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