

**Urging all of you amateur snappers out there to enter  
Sir David Suchet on the magical experience he had on a**

**A**rise, Sircole Poirot! If ever a knighthood were justified it must surely be David Suchet's, bestowed in the delayed Queen's Birthday Honours last year for his body of work on stage and screen over the last 50 years. Sir David of course is thrilled, although he's still waiting for the investiture.

'It should hopefully take place on 16 December, but we were told we could use the titles because the Birthday Honours were postponed courtesy of the pandemic,' he says. 'I'm a great romantic, so to kneel before a senior member of the Royal Family and to feel the sword placed on my shoulder will be the highest moment of my professional life. That ceremony goes back centuries, such a wonderful established tradition. I know how humbling it will feel.'

His wife Sheila was no less thrilled. 'She was amazed and asked me what it really meant. So I told her it meant that she was now Lady Suchet! She certainly deserves it. I can honestly say I'd have had no career whatsoever without her love and sup-

**'I'm an  
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port. She has never, ever said no to anything I've wanted to do, even though it sometimes meant great sacrifices to the family. She's always told me that I must do what I felt compelled to do, professionally speaking, and she and the children would work around that.'

A keen photographer throughout his career, Sir David first agreed to be a judge in our annual Great British Wildlife Photography Contest five years ago. He then became our head judge and this time, his third, we've dubbed him our Judge Emeritus. Clare Balding, who has taken over the head judge's role, launched the current competition in April 2020 but because of the restrictions imposed by the pandemic we decided to extend the closing date until 31 October this year. The competition is open to all amateur photographers, who are asked to submit their images of native British wildlife in its natural habitat.

'Truly, I'm always so honoured to be asked,' says Sir David. 'Not least because it reflects my life's other passion. I'm not a professional photographer, I'm an enthusiastic amateur like

the readers. But every year I'm struck by the fact that the entries that make the shortlist could rank alongside anything taken by a professional.'

The prize this time round for the overall winner of the contest is an all-expenses paid trip to the Camargue in the south of France and a four-day masterclass with Simon Stafford, one of our two technical judges, in how to photograph the animals there. Sir David

didn't have to be asked twice if he'd like to sample the workshop for himself before Covid-19 struck.

'I'd been aware for some years that the Camargue was famous for its flamingos, white horses and black bulls,' he says. 'What I didn't know was that there were workshops there specifically set up to help people take photographs of these animals, so I was thrilled to be invited.'

He'd already worked with award-

winning wildlife photographer Simon on a trip to North Uist in the Outer Hebrides a couple of years ago. 'I learnt such a lot from him and decided to take my Leica V-Lux camera on this latest adventure. Simon was incredibly helpful in talking to me about settings and so on – all the technical things I needed to know – to get me started. The big plus was that it is run by Create Away, a company that runs regu-

lar wildlife workshops in the area.' Its guiding light is top photographer Serge Krouglikoff. 'He made me feel important, not because I'm a so-called celebrity but because I'm

## **TWO DOZEN BULLS DIDN'T SCARE ME**

The black bulls of the Camargue, which are allowed to roam the marshlands, can be an imposing sight, says Sir David. 'I've never been in close proximity to these animals in that number, there must have been at least two dozen of them. But I can't say I felt frightened at any point.'

Sir David has now had a chance to look through

the many shots he took and has found one in particular which he likes a lot (right). 'It's of a gardian behind a single bull whose two front legs precisely mirror the two front legs of the herdsman's horse. As my Fleet Street photographer grandfather Jimmy Jarche used to say, "All you need is one shot."'



# **WILD HORSES SHOULDN'T STOP YOU ENTERING OUR BRILLIANT PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST**



**LONELY ISLE** The Isle of Mingulay in the Outer Hebrides was abandoned by its last residents in 1912 as its population



# our fabulous Wildlife Photography Contest before it closes, our Judge Emeritus photography masterclass in the Camargue in France – the top prize for our winner

A black stallion galloping in front of Sir David's camera

## I FELT MY HEART THUMPING!

The horses of the Camargue are allowed to run wild, and perhaps the climax of Sir David's trip was photographing them in marshland and at the water's edge on the beach. 'I've never seen horses living naturally in the wild and it's something I'll always remember. When the gardians got them to

walk and then canter and finally gallop in the marsh water or the sea, it was thrilling to witness their sense of flight in unison. I'm usually rather reticent around horses, something I think they pick up on. But these ones let me stroke their manes and blow up their nostrils and I wasn't apprehensive at all.'

On the final morning of the trip, Sir David got the chance to photograph a single black stallion. 'He

took me right back to my childhood, to one of my favourite books as I was growing up: Black Beauty by Anna Sewell. At the sight of this magnificent Andalusian stallion I felt my heart thumping in my chest. The gardian put some food down in the surf and to watch him gallop towards his next meal, the sea spraying up from his hooves, his black body against the white water, was extraordinary. I felt very privileged to be there.'

## THEY REMINDED ME OF CONCORDE

Sir David won't forget his first sight of the flamingos at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, the capital of the Camargue. 'I was told there were around 2,000 of them in their natural habitat. We were there at the beginning of their courting season, which explains why they were so pink as they showed themselves off to prospective suitors. And you should see them fly! They were like precision arrows flying

from afar to the marshland where they live and then, like aeroplanes, gliding in to land, their long legs splashing through the water. They reminded me of Concorde.'

It might have been down to beginner's luck, he says, but he did manage to get one shot of three of them in a mid-air formation (above). 'It was a wonderful, happy chance that my camera went click at

that moment. A second before or after and it wouldn't have been the same picture. It gave me enormous confidence. And that's a message I want to share with anyone reading this and contemplating submitting their pictures to the contest. Don't ever think you can't do something because, just occasionally, you can!'

a passionate photographer,' says Sir David. 'But I was very much the new boy on the block. I wasn't nervous because I know photography and I know my camera. What I was apprehensive about was whether I'd be capable of photographing completely different animals from the ones we encountered on Uist. You had to grab your chances there: animals don't hang about posing.'

French-born Serge's maternal family lived for generations in the Gard region, near the Camargue. One day, his British wife, Ros Bennett, saw a report in a Sunday newspaper about a photographic workshop in the area. They spontaneously decided they'd move back to Serge's homeland in France from the UK where they'd been living and try to set up their own company offering the same service to professional and

amateur photographers alike wanting to capture the rich variety of the Camargue wildlife.

Ros and Serge launched Create Away seven years ago and it took off from the start. Through advertising, a dedicated website and word of mouth, the fledgling company grew in strength to a point where it now runs workshops nine months of the year (in the winter they go to Cuba and India) for photographers from around the world. Simon Stafford became affiliated with the company four years ago and now runs a workshop with them in the spring and autumn.

Sir David knew the white horses, black bulls and pink flamingos were guaranteed to be in the Camargue. 'The challenge was to photograph them in what were, loosely put, set-up shoots. Yes they were all "wild", but they'd be rounded up and herded

into place by the local mounted herdsmen, or "gardians", for our benefit. Having said that, the animals can be unpredictable. The horses or bulls might suddenly run off or the flamingos spontaneously take flight. Either way, I had to capture the raw emotion of these fantastic animals.'

The challenge subsequently was to pick a clutch of favourite shots (see boxes). 'If, out of the 2,000-plus pic-

tures I took in the Camargue – thank you, digital – I can select 10 or 12 of those I consider the best, I will have memories of an experience I will never forget,' says Sir David.

Photography has been a lifelong passion, and in 2019 he published a book called David Suchet: Behind The Lens, a collection of photographs and anecdotes. All his proceeds from the book will go to the Tuberous

Sclerosis Association. Sadly, there is a reason for this. Sir David's grandson – his son Robert's first child – was born with this rare, complex condition that afflicts only about ten babies a month in the UK.

'He's six now and he's doing really well. But he can't speak and he's only just learning to feed himself. The earlier the condition is identi-

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declined from its peak of 150 recorded in 1881 (Scotland's Sacred Islands, tomorrow, 11.30am, BBC1)



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fied, the worse it is and he was diagnosed at three weeks. It's currently incurable so any money goes into research. But my little grandson is so full of love, so giving. We're incredibly lucky to have him.'

The arbitrariness of what happened must have tested Sir David's considerable faith. 'Yes, all suffering in the world tests one's faith all the time. It's not easy and one should never pretend it is. It's a challenge to believe that the God of love can also allow such suffering. But it doesn't stop my faith. In a sense, because it tests it, it makes it stronger.'

Sir David is currently touring his one-man show Poirot And More – A Retrospective around UK theatres, but throughout all his many and varied activities it is photography that represents his greatest escape. That's why he's so happy to be a judge in our competition. 'I thoroughly approve of an enterprise that takes people away from politics and news at this most difficult of times and encourages them to get out and enjoy nature and wildlife. I applaud it and I'm very proud to be a part of it.' ■

**Richard Barber**

*For more info, visit [create-away.com](http://create-away.com). For details on how to enter our competition, visit [dailymail.co.uk/wildlifecompetition](http://dailymail.co.uk/wildlifecompetition). For tickets to Poirot And More – A Retrospective, visit [atgtickets.com](http://atgtickets.com).*

## AND TAKE A LOOK AT HOW OUR LAST WINNER GOT ON...

Ian took this stunning shot of flamingos. Below: his winning image from our Great British Wildlife Photography Contest



Weekend reader Ian Brown not only won the Birds category in our most recent Great British Wildlife Photography Contest with his study of a red kite, he also won the overall prize of a trip to the Camargue with Create Away and Simon Stafford to photograph the animals there.

'It was one of the most outstanding experiences of my life, I'll never forget it,' says Ian,

54. 'The first day we went to the bird reserve. To see the flamingos in such big numbers was really impressive. The black bulls were more menacing so we stayed on the back of a truck and photographed from there.

'We were on the beach the next day and the early evening light was stunning. For me, the wild horses were the peak of the trip. I took more than 8,000

shots while I was away but the best were of the horses running towards me through the surf. I also picked up useful tips. I use a Sony A9 semi-automatic which pretty much relies on the camera selecting the shutter speed. But Simon suggested I also try a manual setting. That way I was able to dictate the composition of some shots. It's prompted me to try that again.'

