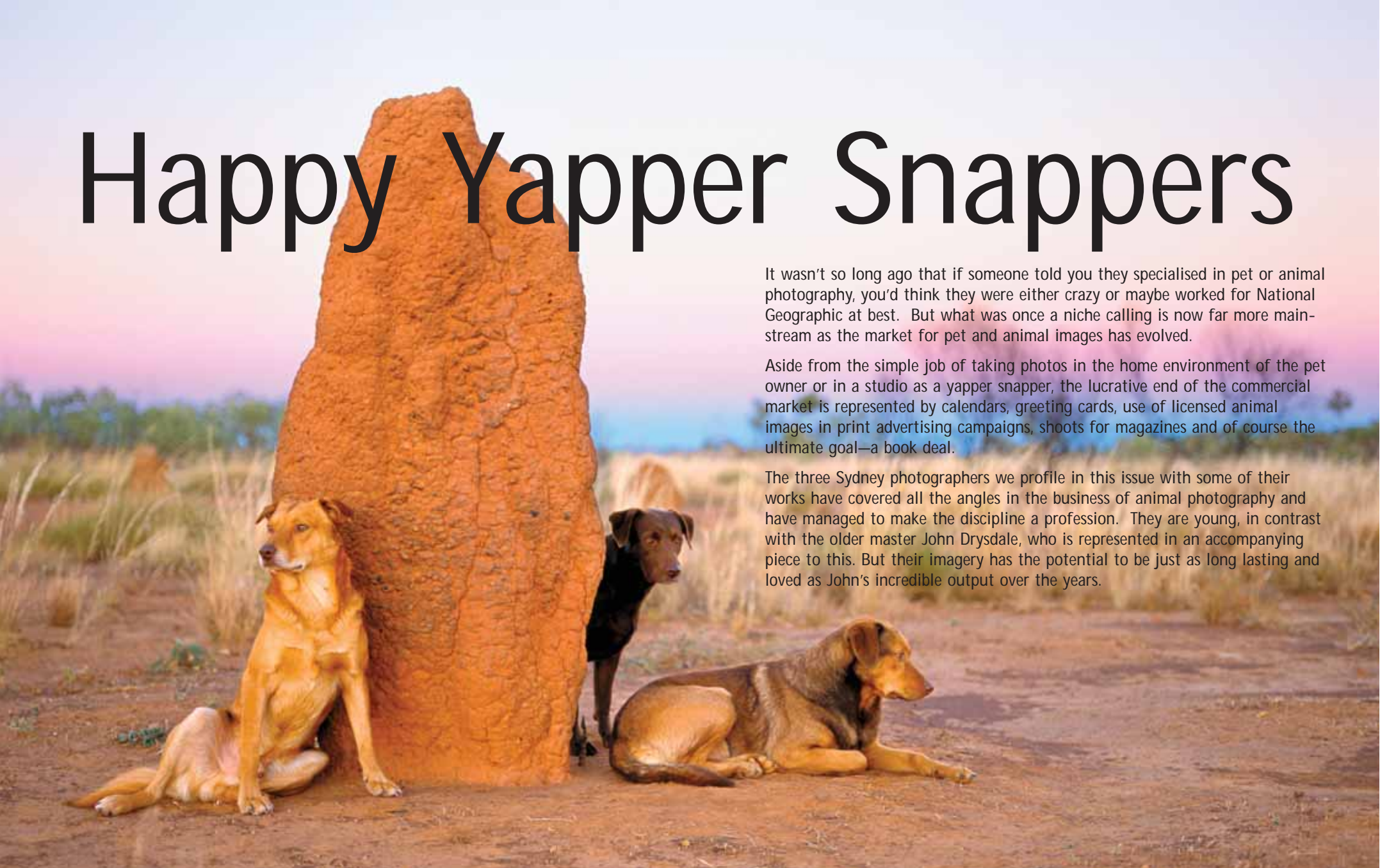


# Happy Yapper Snappers

It wasn't so long ago that if someone told you they specialised in pet or animal photography, you'd think they were either crazy or maybe worked for National Geographic at best. But what was once a niche calling is now far more mainstream as the market for pet and animal images has evolved.

Aside from the simple job of taking photos in the home environment of the pet owner or in a studio as a yapper snapper, the lucrative end of the commercial market is represented by calendars, greeting cards, use of licensed animal images in print advertising campaigns, shoots for magazines and of course the ultimate goal—a book deal.

The three Sydney photographers we profile in this issue with some of their works have covered all the angles in the business of animal photography and have managed to make the discipline a profession. They are young, in contrast with the older master John Drysdale, who is represented in an accompanying piece to this. But their imagery has the potential to be just as long lasting and loved as John's incredible output over the years.



## David Darcy Photography

David Darcy is a professional photographer based in the Blue Mountains. His stunning images of working dogs and outback mongrels are captured in two books 'Mongrel Country' and 'Outback Mongrel'. He also specialises in large framed prints of his extensive catalogue. He's spent many years traveling Australia with his beloved pack of dogs, finding unique country and outback locations as backdrops for his subjects. [www.daviddarcy.net](http://www.daviddarcy.net)

You've spent a great deal of time in the outback and in some pretty harsh locations. What initially drew you to these locations? Was this sometimes lonely, scary or challenging?

I was initially drawn to the outback by my sense of adventure and challenging myself, as well as my passion for travel. Yes it was lonely and scary the first few times in the outback by myself, but as I became more confident and comfortable, it grew on me as a very peaceful place.

Your gallery was located in Leura, which would attract tourist traffic. Your photos have a distinctly Australian feeling to them. Do you sell mainly to Australian or international collectors or is this too hard to quantify?

My Leura Gallery is in the process of relocating. During the five years in the previous location, I sold quite a lot of my work to international tourists and visitors.

What came first - the prints of the photos or the books?

The pictures came first. Two weeks after I opened my gallery, Lothian Books approached me about doing my first publication.

What started you doing dog photography?

I started doing dog photography for several reasons. First, there was the chance photograph that happened when one of my dogs ran into a landscape photograph I was taking. I was just a hobby photographer at the time, but I thought it made for a great shot. This then triggered my need to capture dogs in the most natural way possible without prejudice or status, just dogs being dogs.



**Campfire.** This shot was taken about 300 kilometres north of Birdsville. It was a colder than usual morning and the dogs all gathered around the fire for warmth. I was about to cook the morning's bacon and eggs, but the photograph beckoned to be taken before breakfast.

**Termite Mound.** The termite mound is one of those magic moments that reminds me of why I do what I do. When I look at this picture, I remember walking around in acres of termite mounds all afternoon on the NT and QLD border near Mt Isa. The dogs had been playing in and around them, chasing one another like school kids. Then as the sun set, they finally had a rest by one of these earthy tombstones as I prepared their food for the night.



**Doc.** This photo was taken on a homestead at Collector in NSW. He had been playing in and around the water tank for ten minutes or so, and I knew it was just a matter of time until I got the shot. The thing about this photograph is, that after I took it, I went home and put the film in the fridge and forgot about it for six months. It wasn't until I developed it that I realised there was a good shot on the roll.



**Puppy on White Chair.** Worn and weathered with love and time this old armchair on the porch of a farmhouse in central Queensland beckoned to be photographed. On closer inspection of the property I discovered this little fellow around the backyard. He was more than happy to spend an hour or so playing on the porch until it came time for us to part.

**Is it your main business now or do you have to support yourself with another craft?**

Photographing dogs has now become my career. I'm extremely fortunate that I'm able to support myself by doing something I love, but this also comes because of the choices I made years ago.

To follow a dream, even though it meant struggling as an artist. To be rewarded with complement instead of cash. And to know that fundamentally I was doing something good for animals.

**Define your one magic moment behind the lens when it came to shooting an animal?**

I honestly don't have one defining moment that I could say has been the best. As I look back at the last five years, I see a collage of dogs, dust, places and people. There are so many great locations where my dogs have run free for hours. Also, I've seen many wonderful relationships between men, women, children and their dogs.

**Are dogs your favourite subjects to shoot?**

Yes, dogs are my favourite animals to photograph. I have been asked a million times when will I do a cat book, But I just don't have the same wonderful affinity for other animals as I share with dogs.

**We know your subjects do tricks. What are your best tricks, or techniques when it comes to shooting your subjects?**

There are many small tricks that help get a better shot, just like a strange noise to get the animals' attention. Perhaps a stick to get the dogs excited and alert. Even a wet coat to help him shine in the sun. But my best trick is no trick at all; it's time and patience, and plenty of both.

**What was your most frustrating animal photography moment?**

Frustrating moments happen to me usually when someone else is around and they distract the animal!

**How would you describe what makes a great image of animal photography?**

A great photograph to me is one where the animal looks happy or content or indifferent to the person taking the picture. Like a bear catching fish in the wild, a monkey in a tree or a dog chasing a stick. It can be elaborately set up or a snap shot--so long as it appears as though the person took it because they saw the magic in the animal itself.

**Do you have any influences when it comes to animal photography or your own favourite animal photographer?**

I don't have a favourite animal photographer as such. Although I have seen many wonderful creature photographs. I find more inspiration in paintings and have been influenced by Australian painters like Drysdale, Boyd, and Tucker more than other photographers.

**Black and white or colour... film or digital... which do you prefer?**

I still shoot on film, with medium format cameras. I like black and white for its nostalgic feel and slow colour film because it soaks up the various tones of the country. I'm yet to shoot any digital dog photographs, although I know it's just around the corner.

## Animax - Danielle Lyonne

Animax was started by Danielle Lyonne just over a year ago. This photography business was set up to cater to the growing need for people wanting stunning pet portraits. As Danielle says, "to communicate to the viewer and remind us of how wonderful our pets are". Danielle works out of studios situated in Leichhardt, Waverly and Parramatta. She also has a mobile service and will travel to clients' homes as she recognises that many pets are more comfortable in their own environments. She lives in Leichhardt with her dog, Buddy, and husband, music composer/producer, Steve Francis. [www.animax.com.au](http://www.animax.com.au)

**Background image by Animax.** I had picked up this glass months earlier and was waiting for the right subject. Along came this Maltese puppy, a very mischievous, active little puppy who lasted about 1 second in the glass. Fortunately I got the shot.

**The old saying of never work with animals and children - you're immersed in working with animals - how do you manage to capture a shot of some attention-deficit dog or catatonic cat?**

I have the patience of a saint! Nah, I just know heaps of tricks and have no shame. Balls, squeaky toys, food, if this doesn't work I'll bark, meow, hiss. I'll do whatever it takes!

**You've said that you'll put any image of an animal on anything - key rings, mugs, t-shirts - what is the favoured medium for your pet loving clientele?**

Key rings. Because they're portable and people can easily show everyone their favourite friend. My husband carries a keyring of our dog, Buddy, and can quickly whip out Buddy's image to show everyone. I also print up photos onto a canvas material. People really like these as they look more like paintings than prints and give the shot a great texture.

**You do quite a bit of charity work for the RSPCA, supplying them with photographs for their magazine. How did you get involved in this?**

I contacted 'Animals' Magazine and told them of my photographic background to see if I could be of help. Fortunately for me a job came up that their regular guy couldn't do so I got this job going to Enngonia (100km beyond Bourke) to document a free vet and desexing day in a disadvantaged remote community.

They don't have much money and the dogs and cats are often in bad health. Everyone donates their time from the vets, vet nurses, rangers to the community elders. It was such a great experience. I believe we should all give a bit back to help the disadvantaged be they animals, people or nature.

**What started you doing animal photography?**

The inspiration came from the love of my life--Mr Buddy Love--a red and white Border Collie. When I first got him, people would show me these blurry, overblown photos of their pets. When I started shooting Buds, I realised why.

Even with my experience, I have to adapt so many things when shooting squirmy and distracted subjects. So I started shooting a few friends' pets in my spare time and it has now grown into my business. I love it!

**Is it your main business now or do you have to support yourself with another craft?**

I studied commercial photography for two years at TAFE and have since been working as a professional photographer for the past five years. I do advertising and fashion and also seem to do a lot of my work in theatre and dance. In a bizarre way, this experience helped prepare me to shoot pets as they're always on the move. So one day I'll be shooting a jeans fashion campaign and the next, a couple of tear-away Pomeranians. At least I know I can get the Pomeranians attention with food treats!



Boo. I find cat's eyes so powerful. The intent. You know they're always aware and watchful. I believe inside the quietest cat there lies the heart of a tiger!



It was a cold day and this was a scarf I had on around my neck and as puppies seem have two speeds - turbo charged or unconscious - we made the most of the quiet time. To me there is nothing more serene than when you watch a puppy sleep. For a moment at least they are absolute angels.



Baci. One of the nicest things about dogs is that no matter what, they are always happy and excited to see us!

## Animal Eyes Photography - Melanie Whitten

Since 1994, Melanie has made photography her profession. She started out specialising in ad and commercial photography working on a large number of advertising campaigns—everything from food to fashion. She now combines two passions—photography and pets in her business 'Animal Eyes'. She moved from Canberra to Sydney in 2003 where she lives with Huskie/Golden Retriever X, Keyser and partner, artist manager Greg Donovan.

You say in your website that your rescued dog Keyser gave you the inspiration behind 'Animal Eyes' - how so?

Keyser was a dumped and unclaimed dog that I found walking the streets about 9 years ago now. He motivated me into the decision of venturing towards a small (but full-time) business. He showed me that a special bond does exist between animals and humans. I knew this, but hadn't experienced it myself.

We'd had lots of dogs when I was growing up, so it's not like I hadn't enjoyed a dog's company before. But it was all those unusual things, like him sensing my arrival home way before I actually showed up. How he seemed to know what I wanted without talking, he just saw the expression on my face. And most of all, how he made me feel when I was feeling down.

Define your one magic moment behind the lens when it came to shooting an animal?

For me, I don't think it's possible to define only one moment. I think when it's been a long day and nothing seems to be working, then suddenly it's like the clouds part, and the sun shines through and BAM! You get THE shot. Suddenly, your whole day is worth it. I love it.

We know your subjects do tricks. What are your best tricks, or techniques when it comes to shooting your subjects?

Stay, most definitely, and Sit. It makes it a lot easier, but having said that, sometimes it's the ones with no training who can be the most responsive to the camera. I also have a close friend who was a puppeteer on the film 'Babe' and she gave me insider tips on how to attract attention and get the most reaction for a really good shot.

What was your most frustrating animal photography moment?

Trying to photograph four poodles in a basket. Every time we'd almost get the four in, two would bounce out. It was like they were spring loaded. The dogs thought this was the best game they'd come across. Eventually I got the shot using the 1.5 second rule—any animal will do almost anything for 1.5 seconds.

How would you describe what makes a great image of animal photography?

You can't describe it—only see it. When you see the animal's character, emotion or 'soul', that is what makes it great.

Do you have any influences when it comes to animal photography or your own favourite animal photographer?

My influences are many and varied. I find myself influenced by other photographers, artists and sometimes something as simple as the colour of a cat's fur. But no real one influence. As for my favourite animal photographer, credit has to go to Rachael Hale. Of course I think David Darcy's images are truly beautiful.

Black and white or colour... film or digital... which do you prefer?

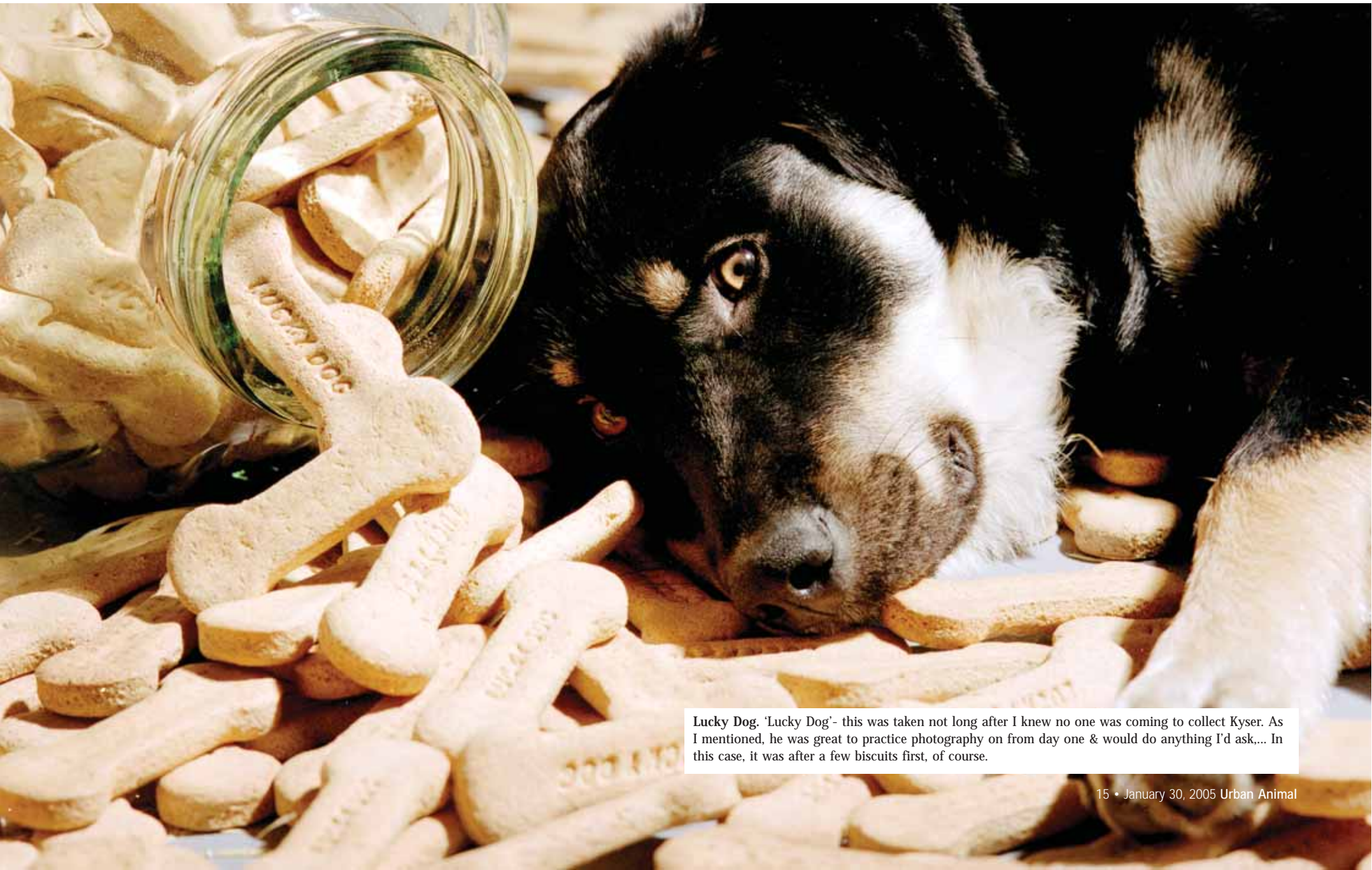
All of the above. Though I find myself using my film camera less and less. I love digital. It gives so much more control from start to finish. The high-end digital cameras are superb. I use Canon's 1 DS a lot and think it more than rivals film.

Keyser hadn't been treated well and so he was appreciative of his new life and me. Simply, it was as if he'd do anything I'd ask and posing in front of my camera became second nature to him from day one. He made animal photography seem easy to accomplish and was a great dog to practice on. More importantly, I feel that Keyser showed me the way into the next stage of my photographic career. So really, we found each other for a reason, and I've always found some significance and meaning behind things that happen that way.

You also mention that at that time pet portrait services weren't available to the public. Did it take long for your business to take off?

Nine to 10 years ago, this type of business didn't exist. Photographers would have done it on request. But it seemed at the time, this concept was bigger in the 1830s, when photography was born and dogs included into the family portrait was huge and the normal thing to do.

When I wanted to open a studio just for pets, most people did think it was a crazy idea. Reactions were 50% positive, 50% negative. However, I had the opportunity to let the business grow naturally without the massive overheads. At the time I was working for a commercial photographer who let me use his studio for my pet shoots. This was perfect for testing out the niche market in Canberra, where I was living, before actually opening a dedicated studio. But it took about two years to become a feasible business.



Lucky Dog. 'Lucky Dog'- this was taken not long after I knew no one was coming to collect Keyser. As I mentioned, he was great to practice photography on from day one & would do anything I'd ask,... In this case, it was after a few biscuits first, of course.



**Bath Time.** A lot of my clients are breeders that want conventional portraits and breed anatomy photography. With such well trained animals it's hard not to offer something unique & different to do after those shots. I had all the time in the world to get this image & as you can see each face has an individual expression, which is usually hard to capture with so many dogs.

**Did anybody close to you (friends/family) tell you that this wouldn't work? Or were people generally encouraging of your business idea?**

My mum did have a few reservations about me opening up the studio. Being in small business for most of her life, she understood the stresses involved. Mum is also from the farming generation; she absolutely adores dogs, but like many, saw no need to get professional photos done of them. It didn't take her long to see all the different streams of income—from the studio portrait, into the veterinarian's surgery or to the track of a sled dog race. She's since got a special little dog of her own and can now understand the reasons one would get a portrait done.

**How did you initially market your concept and start to get paying gigs?**

Years before opening the studio, I began letting people know that Animal Eyes existed by setting up a stall at the local markets and all the dog and cat shows. By having large framed prints on display and a portfolio to show people my style, this seemed to work well. I discovered this also led me back into commercial work, as there were many other pet related businesses at these events that needed advertising photography for their own promotion. Word of mouth has worked for me mostly from then on.

**Some of your shots are studio ones. Have you ever encountered a situation where your concept of the shot just wasn't going to work—either with the animal not co-operating or their human wanting to change an element that would alter your initial concept?**

Cats come into mind with this question... most cats don't like the studio lighting, so it's always difficult to get what you want. It once took me a year to finally get one idea down on film. It was my homage to Looney Tunes—the cat hiding behind a big rock looking up to the sky and waiting. Next to the rock is a big pile of bird seed with a 'FREE BIRD SEED' sign coming out of it. About five cats had auditioned for the position previously and failed.

**Has there been any time where you've cringed at an owner's idea of a shot—or is has this become part of the job with fitting in with the owner's requests? Basically, does your art suffer for the sake of a paying gig?**

After getting all the details and an understanding of what my customer wants, (which they usually leave up to me anyway), I'll do a variety of different looks in one session. From the classic B&W, to the vibrant (cross processed) wide angle, 'all nose' shot. This will cater to everyone's taste and can change the overall view of what a pet portrait can look like.

I can judge the co-operation level of an animal in the first minutes of a session. I've learned to start off with the basics to insure a beautiful portrait for the customer before including props, which may not work. I'll usually come up with something artistic for my portfolio leading up to the day and try to do it at the end of a session.

I like to keep each sitting personalised and different from each other. Over the years, I've developed a database of animals that I know will co-operate and are familiar with the studio environment for all my creative ideas.

**Is it your main business now, or do you have to support yourself with another craft?**

I do commercial photography for other businesses in the Pet industry, and also for a few loyal advertising companies.

**Define your one magic moment behind the lens when it came to shooting an animal?**

Maybe I haven't had it yet, or maybe I've had many moments, I don't know. But what comes to mind was not so magic, but a moment of realization for me from behind the lens.



**Ridgebacks.** The concept for an almost exact photo was born during a model's shoot in my early year of photography (every photographer goes through the 'nude' stage). I thought that the contrast between skin & fur would add another dimension to the classic nude. The dog I had used at the time was a friend's ridgeback cross; however the ridge was barely visible. After opening Animal Eyes, a breeder had come by with her magnificent 'known for his ridge' Rhodesian Ridgeback. 'Toomba'. I knew then the moment had come to re-do that original shot.



**Abbey & Monte.** My very first appointment operating as AnimalEyes was photographing these two Persian cats Monty & Abbey. It was also the first time I'd photographed cats in the studio environment. Definitely an insight into what the future held, these two taught me a lot of valuable little tricks from day one. It's an old favourite.

I was photographing a hermit crab in the studio with the full flash lighting. The macro lens was on and I was in for an extreme close-up. He eventually came out of his shell and I was amazed at the movement of these little eyes at the end of the long stalks. FLASH!!!! I took a shot, which he didn't like at all cause he was back inside his home—for another 20 minutes or so...

When he came out again, only for the food we'd tempted him with, I readied myself for another shot. Focusing on his eyes, I then put my finger on the shutter button that was only millimetres away. It seemed that he anticipated the flash, his little crab eyes tried to blink... but instead he quickly peered left to escape the next flash.

I felt really bad, even thinking to myself; maybe this could actually blind the crab for life. I then went on using Tungsten lights to get more shots. I'd discovered that even a crab could have an expression, even if it's only one. The experience also reinstated for me the fact that all creatures have thoughts and feelings.

**What are your favourite animals to shoot?**

My favourite would have to be the glorious Dog... and I feel that I should keep this answer short, or only give one reason why, as not to undermine the other species, especially the gracious cat. The cat portrait is always a challenge and yet very rewarding when you get great results; however I feel there are many reasons why it's the Dog for me.

The main one being that they come in miniature, small, and medium, large and extra large, so the possibilities are endless from a photographic perspective. I especially like variety of cross breeds as they are all so unique looking. I could go on and on but won't...

**We know your subjects do tricks. What are your best tricks or techniques when it comes to shooting your subjects?**

It's all about getting the animals attention even if it's for a split second; most pets will get tired of the same squeaky toy noise after just one or two shots. To triumph over this problem, I've developed my own assortment of animal noises to make them look in my direction. This can often be amusing for the clients but it seems to work well.

Once however, I did scare a poor little dog with one of my strange noises. I've since learned to tone them down. Another very important technique I've learnt over the years is patience. It's a must for getting good results.

**What was your most frustrating animal photography moment?**

This is easy to answer. It once took me an hour to get ONE decent shot of a ferret. They don't like being still at all. And I couldn't even smile during the session, as I was warned he attacks teeth when he sees them.

**How would you describe what makes a great image of animal photography?**

As all animals are individuals and many have idiosyncrasies, I believe it's important to match the character of the pet with their expression and the scenario to achieve a unique portrait. I also like it when the human element is subtly added, and that special bond has been captured in an image.

**Do you have any influences when it comes to animal photography or your own favourite animal photographer?**

Some influence definitely comes from the passionate people I've seen and worked with over the years, who have strived to better the lives of animals. From the pet adoption centers to those 'astute' sea shepherds, I find their dedication amazing. I've been donating my time and services to these organization for years, but would love to do more financially in the future. So I guess these people influence me to work harder and earn more, in order to help more.

**Black and white or colour... film or digital... which do you prefer?**

I use all of the above in one session—call me greedy. I consider them all to have their own different advantages. Being a bit of a traditionalist, I still love using the B&W old darkroom and I do prefer this to colour for the pet/human images. I also prefer the quality of film to the convenience of digital and only use the digital camera for the candid, macro shots.