

# A NATURE'S BEST AMBASSADORS

LAST SUMMER WE LAUNCHED the Nature's Best Photography Ambassador program with the goal of featuring photographers of all ages who share our passion for nature, travel, and the stewardship of wildlife, landscapes, and humanity. We were amazed by the number of requests we received to join this program and by the interesting projects that were presented to us for consideration.

In this issue, we introduce our first group of ambassadors who are making a difference. This special group of adventurers (shown opposite, left to right) includes:

- Nature's Best Photography Students Online editor Gabby Salazar, from Pleasant Garden, North Carolina, USA;
- Matthew and William Burrard-Lucas, photo team from Kent, England, UK;
- Rick Stanley, native of Bethesda, Maryland, USA;
- Dee Ann Pederson, from Houston, Texas, USA.

As they travel the globe documenting nature, Nature's Best Ambassadors will keep us up-to-date on their projects through images, blog entries, publications, and more. In so doing, they will offer insight into their interests in nature and humanity and why the camera has become such an important part of their personal missions. Their world will become your world as they enlighten and inspire.

For more on the Nature's Best Ambassador program and to find out how to become involved, go to [www.naturesbestphotography.com/ambassadors.php](http://www.naturesbestphotography.com/ambassadors.php)



Background: Ecuador by Gabby Salazar. Portraits, left to right: Gabby by Paul Salazar; Matt by Sandra Burrard-Lucas; Will by Matt Burrard-Lucas; Rick by Gabby Salazar; Dee Ann by Nelson Kesim.

## EXPLORING THE WORLD THROUGH THE ART OF PHOTOGRAPHY



# DEE ANN PEDERSON

## MAASAI SERENGETI TANZANIA

I'VE BEEN TRAVELING TO TANZANIA and Kenya for many years, continually drawn by their beauty and rich variety of photographic opportunities. My images illustrate not only the splendor of the landscape and its fauna and flora, but also the way I see and interpret nature as art in this resilient, yet delicate, ecosystem.

Although I have always had a deep love for the wildness of nature, I've also been deeply touched by Tanzania's human presence, having developed a fond attachment for the Maasai people of the Serengeti. The Maasai have lived in reciprocal relationship with this land for hundreds of years, peacefully coexisting with the often-harsh environment and constant threat from large predators. They retain their nomadic ways, subsistence life style, and age-old traditions. Cattle form the basis of their economy, which they protect from lions with fences constructed from acacia thorns. They are a beautiful people—kind, friendly, and calm—who dress in bright, bold colors. Their sense of community is strong, and they are known to the outside world for their gorgeous beadwork.

I have always included a visit with the Maasai in my trips, and over the years we've become friends. The young children love visitors and often flock to meet their guests. I bring gifts for the children, including school supplies and other things that are difficult for them to get, along with simple "fun stuff."

Over time, I've noticed the very visible threats under which the Maasai live. They are notably vulnerable to large wild cats and

even hippopotamus, especially at night when predation is at its peak. For example, women walk down to the streams to get water, and no matter how much care and awareness accompanies them, the risks are never far away. So this past year, I decided to raise the funds to purchase a solar-powered flashlight for every adult in the village.

The details are rather fascinating. Battery-powered lights become useless with no supply of batteries in a subsistence community.

Solar-powered lights are expensive, but essentially last forever. After repeated visits, my observations of behavior among the Maasai made it obvious that if I were to offer flashlights only for the women (who need them most), they'd soon be in the hands of the men instead.

I sought pledges from caring citizens at home and was able to buy 55 BOGO solar-powered flashlights, one for every adult in the village, men and women alike. I purchased different colors for the men and women, enhancing the probability that the men would allow the women to keep their own lights. (The men tend to avoid pink in a rather universal fashion.)

The Maasai are a very special people and I want to say *asante sana* ("thank you very much" in Swahili) to my native Tanzanian guide, Nickson Kassim, who has been by my side for many years and is instrumental in helping me coordinate each year's ritual.



Nickson Kassim (2)

**ABOVE:** "Maasai women love engaging with others, through both friendship and giving back. I've been honored to receive gifts of their beautiful beadwork—necklaces and bracelets. Their smiles are warm and loving, the kind that inspires others to appreciate life and the land. It seemed to me they enjoyed this break from the hard work of their daily lives, and became instantly curious about this 'gift of light.'"

Dee Ann Pederson



**LEFT:** "Year after year, I return to greet the same individuals, so I've become accustomed to looking for those I know. I've seen this woman for years. She had given birth to a new baby this year, and I had the chance to visit her hut, not only experiencing this special aspect of her life, but also enjoying a great place for a flashlight demonstration."

**OPPOSITE, INSET:** "Under the shade of an acacia tree, with children gathered around, I took on the role of teacher for a few minutes, enhancing their English lessons 'in nature's classroom.'"

Learn more about Dee Ann Pederson and her photography at [www.windowsofnature.com](http://www.windowsofnature.com). Find out more about BOGO lights (buy one give one) and how you can help bring the gift of light at [www.bogolight.com](http://www.bogolight.com).