

YARROW

# SNOWCAT

HEILONGJIANG, CHINA - 2024

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WORDS BY DAVID

This portrait, taken in the heart of the Siberian winter, is elevated by the weather conditions at the time. On a clear sunny day, it would have been a decent image, but it is the falling snow and the flat light that deliver the needed mood and the sense of place.

I have been deliberating about photographing a Siberian tiger in the habitat that defines it for several years, but North China - where I took this image - had, until recently, been out of bounds for foreigners since Covid. Even now, it is not the most welcoming of places. It's a long way from home, English tongues are rare and, in the winter, it can offer indecently low temperatures.

I recognised that I would need to allocate a good amount of time in the north to wait for the snowfall. Siberian winters are extremely

cold, but it does not snow that often. There are many hours spent killing time in a hotel room but the accommodation is much more comfortable than it used to be. It is such a long way from home and there is little merit planning for a three-day visit anyway. It's an odd job sometimes: I probably invested about 120 hours, including travel time, for two six second windows of opportunity.

On this trip I worked closely with the Chinese authorities and, in retrospect, this brief encounter was only possible because of the help of two or three extremely influential Chinese people. I am reminded that access is a key word in photography and this is normally achieved by investing in people. My charm offensive with my Chinese contacts was several months long. My team knows who they are and their stature within China, but no one else needs to know.

The question that I will be asked about this picture will simply be “how on earth did you get it?”. My answer would be two-fold. I was in a bespoke vehicle with a lower window opening, smaller than a tiger’s head, but larger than a camera lens. The second part of the answer is more important: it was by showing China and the Chinese some respect. Without that there was no chance. I know some people will criticise me for working with a country with a questionable record in conservation, but life is too short and I am an artist first and foremost.

STANDARD  
37" x 55" Unframed  
52" x 70" Framed  
Edition of 12

LARGE  
56" x 83" Unframed  
71" x 98" Framed  
Edition of 12

Prices available upon request

“THESE CATS ARE NOT JUST THE MOST VISUALLY ARRESTING ANIMAL SPECIES ON OUR PLANET, THEY ARE ALSO THE MOST DANGEROUS.

— DAVID YARROW





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