





IN THE DRAGON'S DEN

PHOTOGRAPHER: DOUG GIMESY

If you'd asked me several years ago, 'Do you think a reptile photo could end up being one of your favorite portrait images?', I'd probably have said 'I doubt it'. But over the past year,

I've been working on a series about the illegal trade of reptiles out of Australia, and the more I look at these amazing animals, the more I have fallen in love with them.

Of course, as an ex-zoologist, I'll always find something to love about any animal, but as a photographer, the Boyd's forest dragon (*Lophosaurus boydii*) has captivated me – it really does look like a dragon!

Whenever I think about taking a photo of any animal, my first thoughts always go to their welfare. There are so many things photographers can do which may have unintended negative repercussions. Recently I've been especially interested in impacts of additional lighting and, whilst there are way too many factors to discuss here, some key questions I always ask include; how sensitive might they be to light (and knowing whether they are primarily nocturnal or diurnal gives one a good clue); will the additional lighting be flash or continuous; will the light be harsh or soft; how far away from the animal will any additional light be; and how big might the lighting appear from the animals perspective – for if its very close or large, it may appear more threatening and intrusive. I especially pay close attention to how bright any additional lighting will be compared to any ambient light. I'm sure

everyone can appreciate that when a flash that goes off during the day, it's generally less noticeable than if it goes off in your face at night. Finally, I always try to use the lowest level of additional lighting possible. To do this, I simply crank up my ISO beyond what I normally like to shoot.

For this shot I really wanted to highlight the spines on its throat and head, so to achieve this, I decided to add some rim lighting and also shoot the dragon against a plain black background. This rim light was placed down low behind and to the left. Of course I also wanted to show off the fabulous texture of its scales, and so I set a primary fill light (using a soft box with a grid), a couple of meters away, to the left, and to the side. It's worth mentioning that not having this primary light too close not only reduces the chance of bothering the dragon, but also ensures any specular highlights in the eye doesn't look too large and unnatural. I also chose to use a long macro lens (105mm) so I could keep some distance from him – again, this not only reduces stress, but also means the subject is more likely to keep still.

When I now look back at this image, I'm really happy with the result. I think it does allow people to appreciate how wonderful the Boyd's water dragon is, and that it really does look like a dragon.

NIKON D850, NIKON 105MM F/2.8 MACRO LENS. 1/200S @ F22, ISO 800. OFF CAMERA FLASHES: X 2. ONE THROUGH A SOFT BOX WITH GRID, ONE THROUGH A SMALL DIRECTIONAL DIFFUSER.