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Preface to *Looking at Photographs: Animals*

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The invention of photography in the nineteenth century was something like solving a jigsaw puzzle. Many of the pieces -- such as the camera, and the lens, and the knowledge that exposure to light affected some materials -- had been in place for centuries. The first permanent photograph was made in 1826 by Nicéphore Niépce. However, not until 1839 did a Frenchman, L. J. M. Daguerre, and an Englishman, W. H. Fox Talbot, announce to the public two methods for making photographs. Ever since, photography has been changing the way we see our world.

Painters, etchers and other graphic artists were limited in their ability to observe and represent animals in motion, and in the wild, or under water. And in the early days of photography, the large, heavy cameras and long exposures that were necessary restricted photographers in much the same way. By experimenting, some of them, like Eadweard Muybridge in his studies of "animal locomotion," found ways of overcoming those obstacles. Since then, cameras have become lighter and films much faster. Today, in combination with other scientific advances, photography makes it possible to study and depict the details of animal life in almost any habitat: how they raise their young, find their food, and protect their territory, among other activities. These photographs show us things about tame and wild animals that we were never able to see before.

Over the past century and a half, photographers have made pictures of thousands of different kinds of animals around the world. Within these pages, you'll find underwater photography by David Doubillet, a microscopic study of a flea by David Scharf, action pictures of a housecat by Tony Mendoza, and portraits by Mary Ellen Mark.

But this book isn't just about animals; it is about photography. And understanding photographs is an important skill. This book will help you learn about how photographs are made, what they have to tell us, and how we can get the most out of looking at them

carefully. You can apply the ideas you'll find here not only to pictures of animals, but to the many different kinds of photographs that come into your life every day. We hope that it will change the way you look at and think about all photographs.

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