



# Whispers OF AFRICA

In his new book, *The Centre Cannot Hold*,  
photographer David Gulden explores the mystery  
and majesty of the dark continent.

BY DAPHNE NIKOLOPOULOS

**KING OF BEASTS**  
The male lion, defender  
of his pride, surveys the  
grassy plains near Kenya's  
Rongai River for danger.





“Turning and turning in the widening gyre,  
the falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.

—WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS  
“THE SECOND COMING”



The photographer (above) has employed innovative techniques to capture images of elusive wildlife such as the mountain bongo (above right), which is highly endangered: A mere 100 individuals remain in the wild. These two were photographed at Aberdare using camera traps. It took Gulden three years to get this photo.

Africa, the great enchantress. Many who have visited the dark continent—call them sensitive souls with a distaste for convention—have fallen under its spell and vowed to return.

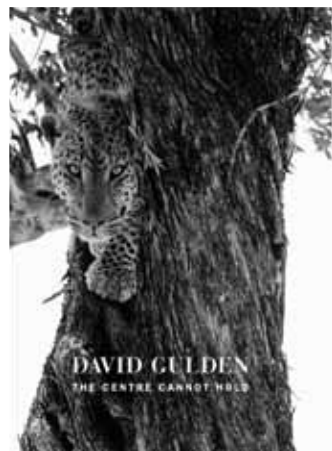
It happened to David Gulden when he was 15. His father, Michael, a longtime Palm Beacher who died last October, took him on safari in Kenya and the Okavango Delta in Botswana, and on to Egypt. Immediately, something clicked. The young Gulden couldn't get the place out of his mind, so during his gap year between boarding school and college he returned for a stint with Kenya's National Outdoor Leadership School. Then he met the photographer and diarist Peter Beard, a friend of his father from the Pomfret School and Yale University, and his life changed.

“Peter was from this privileged background but lived a free lifestyle with total disregard for convention,” says Gulden, a native New Yorker whose family has wintered in Palm Beach for five generations. “I was really influenced by the way he went about life.”

Gulden, 40, never intended to be a photographer, but when he made the choice to live in Africa, it made sense. “It gave me an excuse to be here,” he says. “I wanted to leave a mark, and it felt natural to do that with a camera.”

Looking through his first book of wildlife images, *The Centre Cannot Hold*, it is clear he has attained that goal. A body of work assembled during his 20 years on the continent, *Centre* is a completely original take on African wildlife. Uninterested in showing an idealized view of these animals, Gulden shows his subjects as part of their environment. He works with slow shutter speeds to capture movement and energy, and employs unique angles, such as photographing directly down or up. And he loves close-ups. Some of his images show so much detail—the construction of an owl's feather, say, or the fine fur on a cheetah's underbelly—you find yourself wondering, “How did he *do* that?”

Fact is, it wasn't easy. For Gulden, an average day in the bush requires a lot of trekking through difficult terrain, tracking animals and then observing them, waiting for the right moment to release his shutter. “You have to take time to understand the animals and predict their behavior to record what is happening,” he says.



**TAKING WING**  
An African crowned eagle chick on the throes of flight, captured by using nest-mounted cameras and wireless remote control.





**CAT NAP**  
A female leopard stretches out for a morning nap in the Itong Hills in Kenya's Maasai Mara National Reserve.





**NECK-IN-NECK**  
Male giraffes battle it out for turf dominance with a curious “neck wrestling” match. The winner proves his authority within the herd. Photographed along the Talek River, Maasai Mara National Reserve.

To capture the most elusive creatures, he sets up cameras with infrared triggers in forests like Aberdare National Park in Kenya. That’s how he photographed the rare mountain bongo, one of maybe 100 individuals in the wild and once thought to be extinct.

Part of his visual language is a statement on the fragile nature of African wildlife and its habitat. There are as many shocking images as there are beautiful ones, painting for the observer a picture of the true Africa, where human greed exists side-by-side with raw nature, death alongside life.

Overall, however, his message is one of hope. Yes, destruction of the world’s last wilderness is at hand: The center cannot hold. But life, in all its resilience and dignity, persists, and that is something worth fighting for.

Gulden fights with his camera, and his efforts have not gone unnoticed. Paleontologist Richard Leaky called his images “amazing, inspiring and awesome.” And Beard, who is no small critic, said of Gulden’s work: “The best African wildlife photos yet.” Considering the source, there is no higher praise. ♦



**THE ART OF WAR**  
Zebra stallions fight to establish dominance and the right to breed with certain females. This ritual dance of power was photographed at the Mara Conservancy.



**MIRACLE OF WATER**  
Two elephant bulls drink and bathe in the Lengaiya Spring in Amboseli National Park, Kenya. Mount Kilimanjaro looms large in the horizon.





**BUILT FOR SPEED**  
A mother cheetah and her cub play at the Mara Conservancy. By blurring motion, Gulden captured the speed of the big cat, which runs faster than any land animal.