

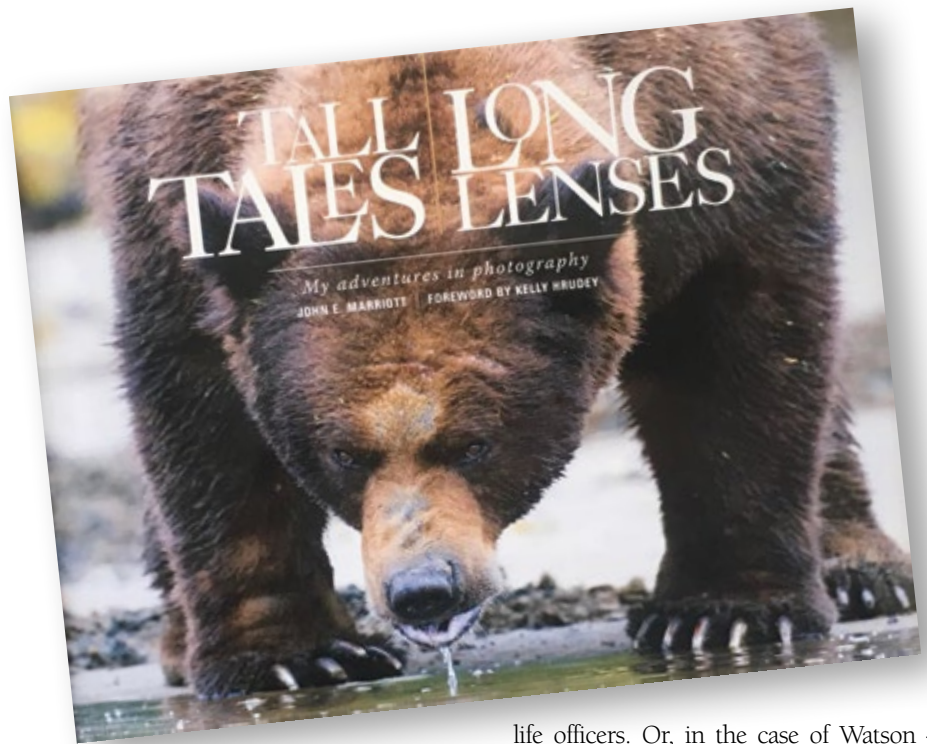
John E. Marriott, *Tall Tales, Long Lenses: My adventures in photography*, (John E. Marriott, JEM Photography, 2017).

Reviewed by Ian Urquhart

“Unforgettable”... that was how *Canadian Geographic* characterized John Marriott’s first book, *Banff & Lake Louise: Images of Banff National Park*. That term is just as applicable to Marriott’s latest book, *Tall Tales, Long Lenses: My adventures in photography*.

Through more than 200 pages of text and photos covering nearly 40 years Marriott evocatively displays his passion for wildlife and the landscapes they need to survive and thrive. If you’re hungry for a book celebrating wild creatures and spaces then *Tall Tales, Long Lenses* should be on your menu of summertime reads. It’s a celebration that takes its cue from a Charlie Russell quote Marriott uses at the beginning of the book. In that quote Russell sketches an ethic where wildness doesn’t threaten us; it sustains us and we will live better lives if we overcome our fear of the wild.

Marriott organizes his tales and his adventures chronologically for the most part. He first takes his reader on a formative fishing trip a five-year old John Marriott made with his father in the B.C. Interior. The book’s final chapters are set in this decade and focus on trips to photograph grizzly bears in B.C.’s Chilcotin, Kluane, and Kwanlinagaitan regions. In between Marriott details the trials, tribulations, and triumphs that came with his quest to become a professional wildlife photographer. That quest took him tens of thousands of kilometres across western and northern Canada – from the Bow Valley Parkway in Banff National Park to the Dome Diner on the Yellowhead Highway to the Dempster Highway in the Yukon, from the headwaters of the Fraser River to estuaries on the Pacific. Marriott’s journey is filled with memorable characters. Some of those characters are the wild creatures Marriott respects and searches out such as Delinda, the Alpha female of the Bow Valley wolf pack, or Frank the Tank, the dominant grizzly male featured on the book’s cover. Others, such as the Yu-



kon’s Trapper Ivan, insert humanity into the wildness.

Tall Tales, Long Lenses showcases Marriott’s remarkable talents well. Along with Wayne Lynch, I think he is one of this country’s premier wildlife photographers. The photos included in this collection comfortably support that judgment. The composition, textures, colours, and details of his photographs prompt a wide range of responses and reactions. It’s impossible not to be moved by photos revealing the power of Frank the Tank, or the playfulness of the two grizzly cubs he named The Devil and The Dark Side. Magical auras emanate from his photos of the Yukon landscape and the Great Bear Rainforest. The beauty of Marriott’s photography alone will lead me to return to it over and over again.

Tall Tales, Long Lenses is much more than a beautiful book to adorn your coffee table. It also conveys important conservation messages. The death of Field in 1992, the first grizzly bear Marriott observed, testifies to how our irresponsible behaviour threatens the place of bears in the wild. Sloppy food storage in Banff National Park campgrounds encouraged Field to develop a taste for human food. Removed from Banff, she didn’t lose that appetite. That appetite led to her death at the hands of Alberta Fish and Wild-

life officers. Or, in the case of Watson – a Kermode bear in northern B.C. – people put themselves and the bear at risk by getting far too close to him alongside the Yellowhead Highway in 2013. These incidents, more than 20 years apart, suggest that our species still has much to learn when it comes to giving wildlife the respect and distance they need and deserve.

For me, the book’s most compelling lesson may rest in its introduction. John’s father offers that lesson through his hope that his son would grow up to share the love of nature the father found flyfishing along Scotch Creek north of Shuswap Lake. That love was one he wanted to share with his son. Without that father’s love of nature and without his desire to share it with his son would John Marriott have become the wildlife photographer and conservationist he is today? Would advocates for wilderness have his photographs and stories to inspire them? John is the first to point out how formative those experiences in and around Scotch Creek were to his world view and ambitions. The lesson for me is that, as supporters of wilderness, we need to do what we can with our own children and/or grandchildren to bring the spirit of Scotch Creek into their lives.

Tall Tales, Long Lenses is a beautiful, compelling collection that any wilderness advocate will treasure.