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Vandyke's photos of a snow leopard hunt were the first ever to be captured at close range. But the reason why the photos continue to go viral, as they did [recently](#), is because it's almost impossible to even spot the elusive big cat.

Captured in the mountains of Ladakh, India, while on an expedition with her company [Wild Images Photo Tours](#), Vandyke tells *PetaPixel* that she and five guests had been tracking an "old male snow leopard" for a few days when a sighting was reported.

"We arrived just as he found a rock ledge to have an afternoon sleep," Vandyke recalls. "It was a particularly cold day with clear skies and a wind chill of around -10C [14F]. Despite the freezing temperatures, I said that we should find a large rock to hide near so we could wait."

"From years of work in the mountains, I knew that predators are mostly active around dusk and since we had arrived at approximately 2 PM, I realised that this might be our only snow leopard sighting for the day," she continues. "So I thought we should sit down and see if this old cat would do something later."

As the temperatures continued to plunge and the Sun was passing behind the mountain, a group of blue sheep walked into the valley — the main prey of the snow leopard on Ladakh.

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"I wondered if the arrival of these animals might spur the old leopard into action. They did. When he sensed them nearby he woke from his slumber and slowly crept down a scree slope to see if he could hunt them. Realising there was nowhere to hide, he went back uphill and then down a neighbouring scree slope which was separated from the original one by a rocky crag. It was there he found a successful place to hide and that's when I took the photo."

That was six years ago. Vandyke says the photo went viral online and is likely her most famous image.

"Even now when I look at it, I wonder how many leopards we might have walked past in the mountains before we finally saw this one. They hide themselves so well in the mountains of Ladakh!" She adds.

"I still find it heartwarming that it gets an occasional revival through social media and the press. The photo is like the ultimate 'Where's Waldo' wildlife image with some people able to spot the leopard and many that are unable to do so."



Hopefully you were more aware than the blue sheep.

Vandyke continues to lead photo tours as director and head photographer of [Wild Images Photo Tours](#). More of her work can be found on her [Instagram](#).

Leopards are famously hard to spot, Hemant Dabi [took a photo of an incredibly well-camouflaged leopard](#), also in India, a few years ago.

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Image credits: Photographs by Inger Vandyke

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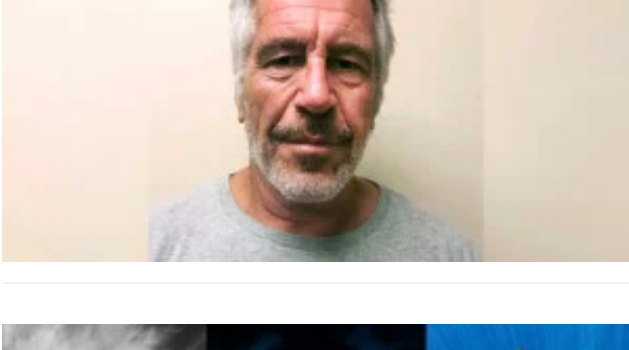
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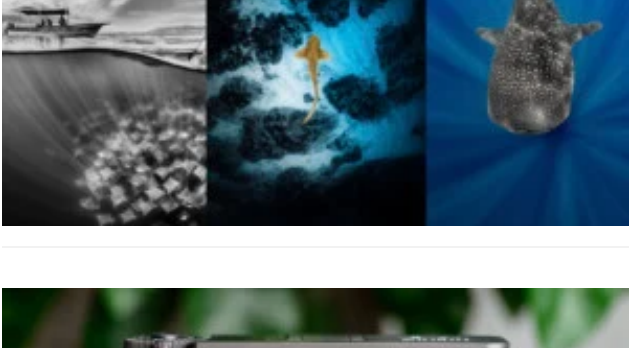
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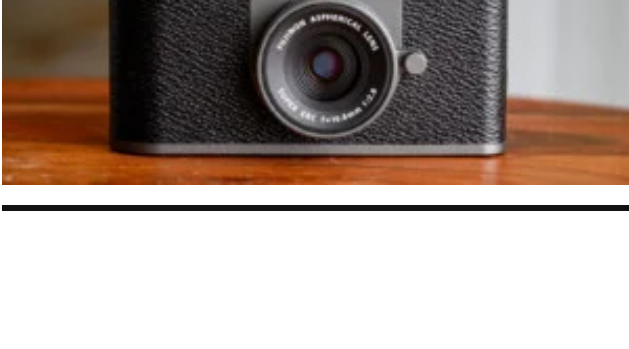
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