



Correcting a Leopard Image in Lightroom

Description

Taking a Good Photo to the Next Level

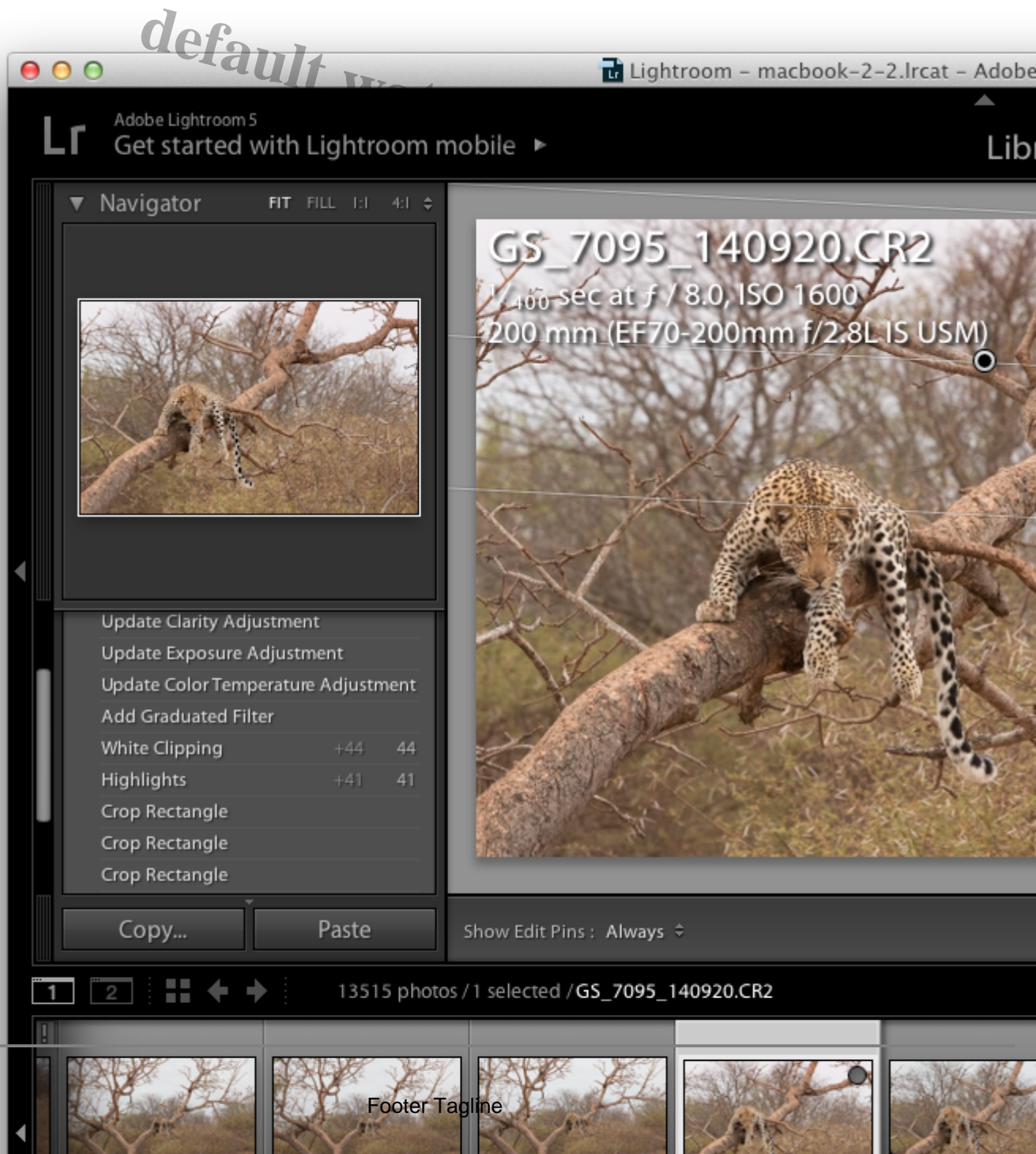


This is the raw image right out of the camera as displayed in Lightroom. Good but it could be better

The first step is always to analyze the image with both my artistic eyes and “the numbers” provided in the histogram. I can make a numbers analysis a whole post just by itself, but the short version is that I am looking for a wide tonal range with something close to a 0 value in the darks and a 100 in the lights. My artistic eye is looking for composition improvements through the crop tool and it wanting dramatic color and a pop to the subject.

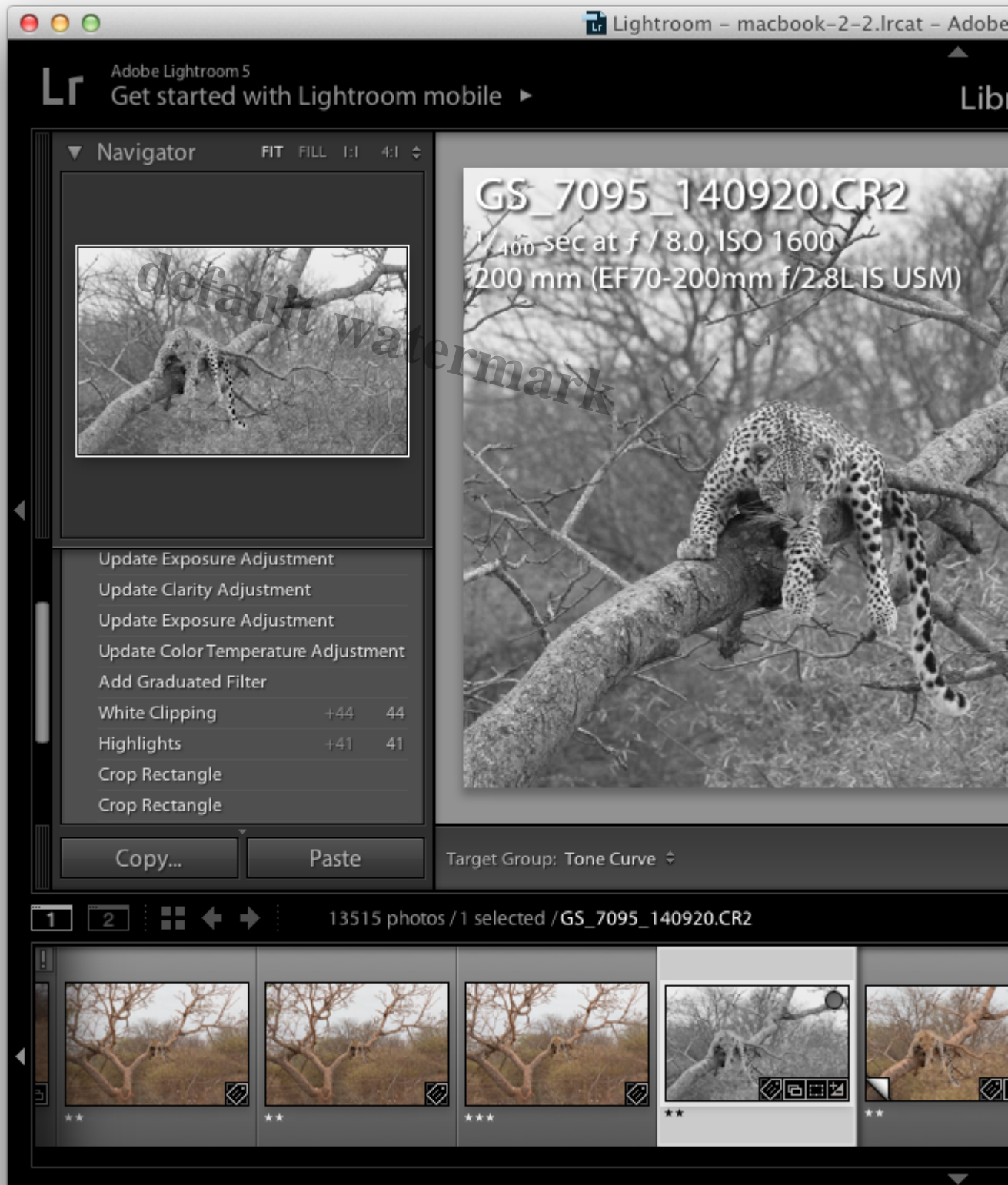
This image of a leopard in a tree has a nice neutral color scheme and a decent tonal range, but I want to do some adjustments to make the leopard pop and take attention as the subject.

I want to brighten the highlights and light tones with the brightest whites in the leopard’s fur. Right now the brightest tones are in the sky instead of the fur, so my first adjustment is to darken the sky and perhaps add a bit of blue at the same time. I came to this conclusion by passing my cursor over sections of the image and reading the values under the histogram as they change.



Adding the graduated filter to darken the sky and detract attention away from it

I use the graduated filter tool to darken the highlights in the sky and saturate the sky using the white balance and saturation sliders. Adding a color to the filter (at the bottom of the options list) does not work in this instance, but it is a good trick to remember for sunsets, etc.



I like to desaturate the image when I use the Curves Tool. It helps me concentrate on subtle tonation

Now I want to adjust the exposure of the whole image. I use the Tone Curve for this using the Targeted Tone Adjustment tool right on the areas I want to adjust. Sometimes it helps to desaturate the image temporarily to help me more easily see areas lacking contrast. I brighten the white fur in the tail and darken the black spots and shadows on the tree. To improve midtone contrast, I darken and lighten areas in the grass. With that finished I use the Exposure slider to brighten all over – just a touch. Then I revisit the Highlights and Lights on the Tone Curve tool until the white fur reads in the 80s or low 90s.

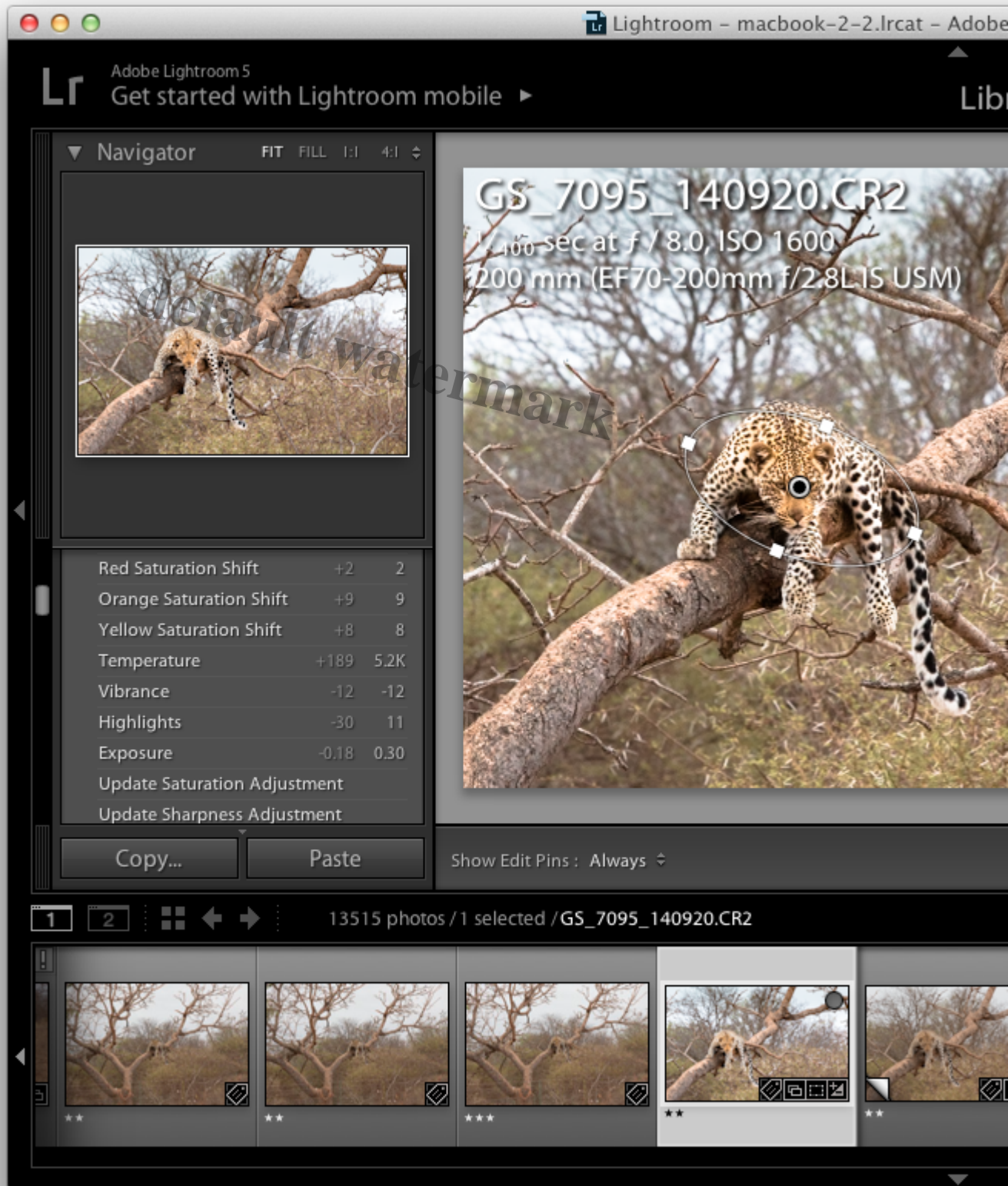


The image after the Curves adjustment

The colors were more intense before I brightened the Exposure. I could increase the Vibrance and Saturation, but the whole image would be increased. This is an opportunity to help pop the leopard by increasing saturation, vibrance and clarity just on the leopard.

Now I want to work on adjustments to just the leopard. Photoshop is the best tool to use for extensive and specific adjustments, but Lightroom has added a few good Targeted Adjustment Tools to the

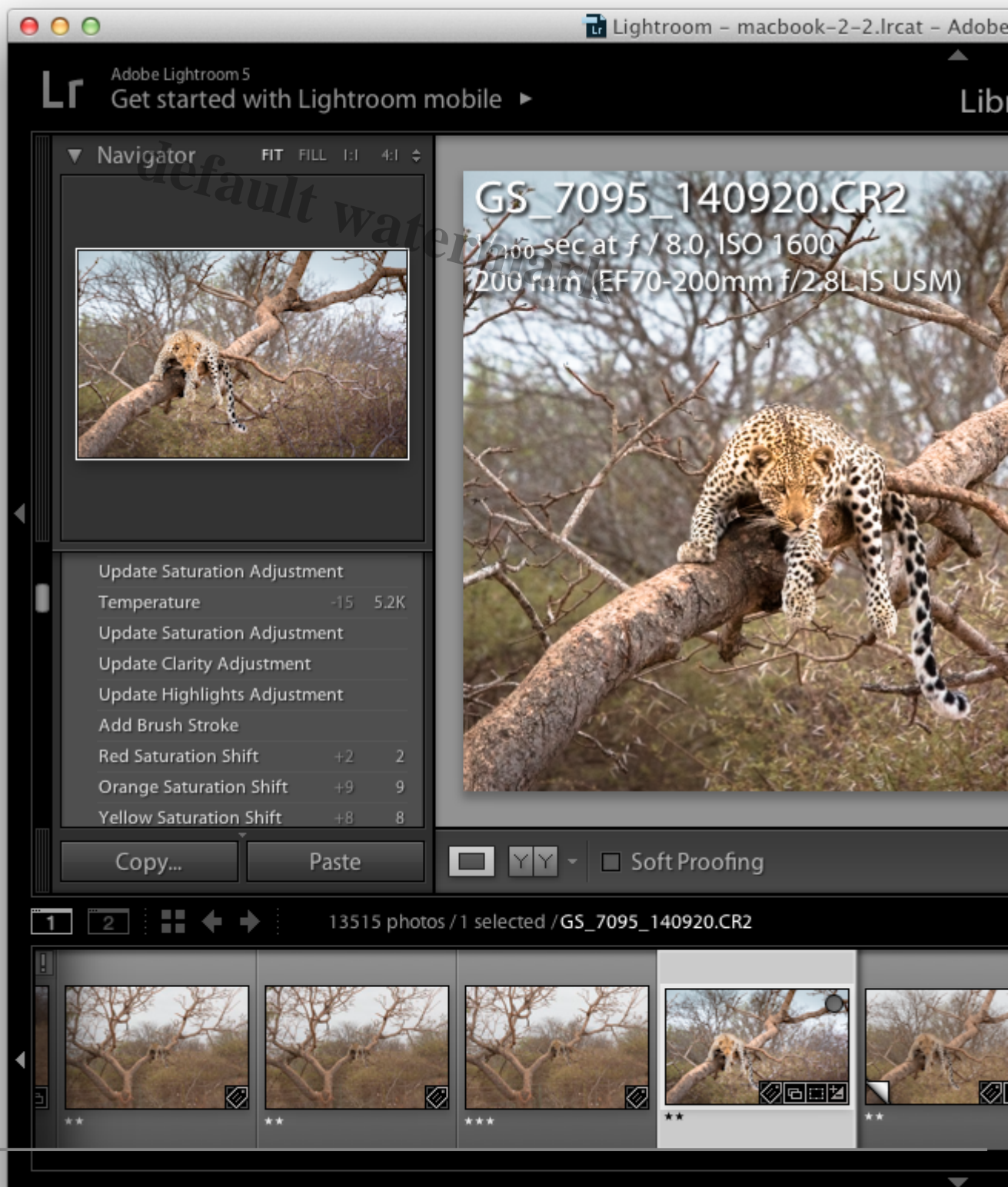
Development Module. They can do an easy job where the selected area need not be too specific and of course they are limited to just the abbreviated list of adjustments contained in the tool. With patience and practice you can make a decent selection for applying the adjustments and you can come back and change it if you want.



Using the Radial Filter Tool on the leopard to add some specific adjustments just to this area aimed

I use the Radial Filter Tool in an oval shape centered over the leopard. First make sure the Invert box is checked so changes happen inside the oval instead of outside. For settings I use a small amount of Exposure increase, increase in Highlights, Temperature +11 to the warm tones, -13 Shadows, increase in Clarity and a small amount of Saturation. Now the leopard pops from the background.

For finishing touches, I can add a graduated filter to darken the grass in the lower right corner and a Post Crop Vignette to darken the corners to further draw attention away from details in the background.



Adding an edge vignette to further downplay background details

One last touch is to use the Target Adjustment Tool to brighten and pop out the eyes and possibly some other face details such as the nose. Zoom way in and add some subtle brightening and Clarity and a color shift to the eyes.



The final result: as vivid as the memory

Now I have a great image I can use online. If I print this I will more refined adjustments especially to the leopard after using Lightroom (or Camera Raw) to do the curve and some color adjustment to the entire image. Sharpening is also required before printing – the Clarity Tool and Lightroom’s sharpening are just not enough for a good print.

I hope this run through has been both advanced and basic enough to help you out. I have other posts which go more into adjustments to specific color ranges – a great technique for lion in the grass shots

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