

Bird Photography

Key Messages - Dave Whiting

Why Photograph Birds

They are an excellent subject because of their beauty, variety and broad appeal. And in the last 10 years cameras, lens and post-processing software have improved dramatically. It has become much easier to create lovely images of birds (but it is still hard!!)

When to photograph birds

- birds are most active at dawn - this is also when the light is good!
- spring and fall migration, nesting season

Where to photograph birds

- start where the birds are used to people and go back to the same places frequently.
- edges, where habitats meet, such as beaches, forest clearings, wetlands, gardens (Isobel Lake)
- try to have the sun and the wind behind you
- birderspots.com and ebird.com

How to photograph birds

- composition principles of photography such of rule of thirds, negative space, position of you to the subject, and subject to the background all apply to bird photography
- photographing birds is really difficult:
- They move quickly and frequently! They are easily spooked. They put real demands on photo equipment and on photographers.
- use a very fast shutter speed, 1/2000 second and at least 10 frames per second
- You and your autofocus need to react quickly
- You are often in low light situations with slow lenses but you need fast shutter speeds
- watch your depth of field if it is a large bird, more than one bird in the frame, or a small bird at a short distance
- check your shutter speed and aperture before each burst
- let the birds come to you rather than you chase them (I have a portable stool)
- avoid butt shots
- always have an eye showing, preferably looking at you

Bird Portraits

- fill the frame if you can, avoid cropping (you will need a long lens)
- watch your backgrounds, particularly white areas
- always include an eye, even better with catch light
- shoot level with the bird as much as possible
- focus on the eye, try to get the whole bird within your depth of field

Interaction - tell a story

- birds with other birds, other critters, or with their environment
- if more than one bird, very difficult to get both in focus

Birds in flight

- birds are like airplanes, they take off into the wind and land into the wind
- try to position yourself with the wind at your back
- photograph birds flying towards you, not away from you
- for large birds watch your depth of field to get the whole bird in focus
- watch for clipping wings at the edge of your frame

Environment

- often can be captured with a shorter lens
- more space around the bird to provide context to the story

Camera Settings:

- don't worry about your iso - more important to get both the right shutter speed and the right aperture (I shoot manual with AutoISO - if the result is noisy there is good software to deal with it in post - you can't fix a blurry or out of focus image)
- consider using Back Button Auto-focus for faster shooting and composition
- new models of mirrorless cameras are particularly good for birds because of subject detection and tracking that keep focus on the eye

Post-Processing

- Post-processing can transform a mediocre image into a "wall-hanger"
- Software today is excellent for removing noise and objects that compromise the creation of an artistic image such as twigs, white spots, and bird feeders. Consider these tools when composing your image.
- Often, only a small number of images are worth keeping. At 10 fps you will return from a photoshoot with many images. You need to develop a method in your workflow to rapidly cull images.

Final Message:

- consider joining the Wildlife Photography Shared Interest Group within our club. It meets about 4 times per year to share and discuss photos as well as go on photoshoots together
- practice ethical bird photography. There are web links on this handout giving you lots of information on how we can sustain birds and bird photography.

Online Resources

1. Good Videos for Getting Started in Bird Photography

Alan Young

Bird Photography for Beginners

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBUDT6SGI8s>

Buy This Gear to Start Bird Photography (on Any Budget

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5eHtBPsUe_0&t=1154s

How to Take Better Wildlife Photos with P.I.E.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFwcKC5-qEw>

Terrence Szeto

Why BIRD Photography is INSANELY DIFFICULT (and how to make it easier)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8HNfVSJ6IU&t=2s>

2. Characteristics of Good Bird Photos

Flying Parrot Photography

What Separates GOOD Bird Photos from GREAT Ones?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTzywVSPZ2Q>

Chiara Talia

Breaking Down a Bird Photo: 8 Mistakes in Composition, Settings & Editing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kDg96Sat6XA>

3. Tips and Techniques

Kevin Hatley

How to Improve your Bird Photography

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DD3EZgo4MQs>

Steve Perry

10 Habits That Will Instantly Improve Your Wildlife Photography

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2qYKXFodx5U>

Bird Finding web tools

Desktop Tools

eBird: <https://ebird.org/home>

BirderSpots: <https://birderspots.com/>

Mobile Phone Tool

Merlin Bird ID by Cornell Lab

Ethical Bird Photography

Bird Photography Ethics - Audubon

<https://www.audubon.org/photography/ethics>

Code of Birding Ethics - Bird Canada

<https://www.birdscanada.org/discover-birds/code-of-birding-ethics>