



### Wildlife Photo tips

1. Try to photograph in the early mornings or late afternoon when the light will usually be softer and the shadows less harsh.
2. A 300 mm telephoto lens or a 100 – 400 mm zoom (with a full frame camera) are usually the shortest lenses for this type of photography. However, a longer lens will help or possibly adding a 1.4x or 2.0 x Teleconverter to the lens if the lens will take it, but these do reduce the light transmission by 1 stop and 2 stops respectively. Some older lenses / systems don't work that well with the 2.0x Teleconverter and they can lose or have soft focus issues. The 1.4x usually works well. Often lenses of 500 mm or 600 mm are used and even then, are used with a 1.4x Teleconverter. The shorter the lens you use means you have to get even closer to the subject. With a cropped sensor reduce the lens length by 1.5 or 1.6 and with a micro 4/3rds by 2. So, a 600 mm lens would be approximately 400 mm and 300 mm respectively, but both the depth of field and light transmission is affected.
3. If using a teleconverter its always worth trying one stop higher, if the light allows, to get just a bit more depth of field, which can help get a sharper image.
4. Get as close to the subject as you reasonably can. Even if you have a long lens you still need to get close. It's a fallacy that you can get good images from distance even with a long lens. To achieve reasonable results the subject needs to fill approx. 15% of the frame when taking the photo and for top quality results its about 20 - 25% of the frame. Have a look at the Professional photographers listed for examples of some great images. Cropping an image too much in post processing will simply reduce the quality.
5. Its always worth taking photos in a short burst (5 shots is good) as often one photo will be sharper than the rest. Not sure why this happens but it seems to, so increase your odds by taking a short burst.
6. You can also take what are called landscape or habitat wildlife photos with 16 mm wide angle or standard 50 – 100 mm lenses, where the animal or bird is just part of a wider scene but for this type of photography the Landscape Photography tips are possibly more suited. Check out Frans Lanting's images for examples as he does quite a bit of this type of photography and they are fantastic. Ben Hall, who will be giving a talk in 2021, also takes this type of image as well as close-up wildlife photography and again they are fantastic.
7. For both types look for interesting compositions.
8. Try to be at eye level with the subject.
9. Check out the background and move around if necessary, to achieve this.
10. Less cluttered backgrounds tend to work best.
11. If possible, have a reasonable distance behind the subject if you want the background to be blurred.
12. Select a complimentary coloured background if possible. Again, move around.

13. Check the direction of the light and how this will affect the subject to achieve the image you want.
14. Use a bean bag, tripod or monopod if possible, to reduce camera movement. If this is not possible increase the shutter speed and make sure image stabilisation is on.
15. Some cameras require / suggest the image stabilisation to be off when using a support such as a tripod. Try it on and off to see how your camera performs best.
16. Once you have found the location wait for the subject if possible, rather than chasing the subject around.
17. Try to capture the subject doing something interesting / different if possible.
18. Leave space on the side the subject is facing so it has room to move into and it's not too cramped within the image.
19. Carry out "border patrol", which is to check for items sticking out of the edges of the frame or possibly just too close to the edge.
20. Select the correct shutter speed appropriate for the subject's movement.  
From 1/250 sec for larger static subjects such as deer to 1/3200 sec for fast moving birds  
Small birds and small mammals have rapid head movements so require faster shutter speeds even when still / perched.
21. Select the correct exposure to provide the correct depth of field required.  
Usually between f4 – f8 depending on subject and background distance.
22. If using Manual on the camera, use auto ISO if possible, to automatically adjust ISO  
A range between 100 and 6400 is ok but the higher figure can introduce noise so be careful here.
23. Check that the exposure / ISO doesn't go out of the set range (it should flash to make you aware of this) and if so, adjust shutter speed or aperture to stay within the set range otherwise you will be adjusting exposure in post processing.
24. Use the histogram or zebras to check there are no areas in the image that is too bright. Be particularly careful about white birds as they can easily have blown out highlights thus losing detail.
25. Consequently, be careful about dark coloured birds against a bright sky as the opposite can happen and the bird will be too dark.
26. Select the appropriate focus type on the camera, usually this will be centre or an expandable flexible spot for still / perched subjects. It needs to be reasonably small, so the focus is exact. Try to focus on the subject's eye if possible.
27. For birds in flight "wide" or "zone" is usually best to pick out birds against the sky. If your camera has "Tracking focus" then use this.
28. Learn to use "Back button" focusing as this can help in some situations. For example, if a perched bird is having a branch or leaves moving across it in the wind, having acquired the focus on the bird with back button focus you can leave it there and it will ignore the branch or leaves rather than keep retrying to focus with every press of the shutter button and sometime therefore trying to focus on the branch or leaves.
29. It's important to check your focus by playing back images so you can retake if the focus is off. There is nothing worse than getting home and that fantastic shot is out of focus.

A selection of wildlife photographers well worth checking out

Art Morris;

Frans Lanting;

Art Wolfe;

Tom Mangelson;

Ben Hall;

Will Burrard-Lucas;

Tom Mason;

Neil McIntyre;

Luke Massey;

Paul Fowlie;

Mark Smith;

Guy Edwards;

Colin Edwards