

Beginners' Guide to

digital photography



[Part 10: Wildlife]

Make Friends with
the Fast Lens

The need for speed

Photographing Birds

Are you up for the challenge?

part ten



Part 10: Wildlife

Make Friends with the Fast Lens

Wildlife is one of the most challenging subjects to photograph and a lot of patience, determination and skill is needed in order to capture consistently good wildlife images. Finding wild animals can often be difficult because, let's face it, they're not going out of their way to be photographed and if they hear you coming they'll quickly head in the opposite direction. If you do happen to come across a subject you must think quickly because the moment is likely to be fleeting.

For this reason it is extremely important to know your camera and equipment back to front, so you can quickly assess the situation and apply the necessary techniques before the subject has a chance to assess its own situation.

One of the most important pieces of equipment for the serious wildlife photographer is a 'fast' lens. A fast lens is one that can achieve a very wide aperture (e.g. f1.8). Remember the wider the

aperture, the more light is allowed through when the shutter is depressed. In turn, faster shutter speeds are obtainable, even in lower light situations. The larger the maximum aperture, the faster the lens and the more expensive it becomes!

With most consumer priced zoom lenses what often happens is that you can achieve, let's say, f2.8 at wide angle (around 24mm-35mm) but only f5.6 at telephoto (around 105mm-300mm) which will often result in shutter speeds too slow for the subject you are shooting.

Note: The optical range of a lens is calculated by dividing the 2 focal lengths of a lens together, e.g: 18mm-55mm lens equates to 3x optical zoom.

For most of us this situation will simply be something we have to learn to live with. Avoid low light situations or adopt an artistic approach to the composition by emphasising any blurring or 'panning' to help improve sharpness.





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Photographing Animals

When photographing wild animals you will have a much better chance of success if you do a bit of planning in advance. If you are shooting a particular animal get to know their habits and habitat. Know when and where they are likely to make an appearance and look for signs of their presence (usually tracks and scats) in the area you've identified. Waterways are often a good place to start looking for animals and often you'll find signs of a couple of different species.

Once you've identified an area, look for a good vantage point. Your hiding spot should be somewhere where you are well hidden from your subject without restricting your view too much (fallen trees and small shrubs often make great 'hides'). It should be at an angle that offers the best background option and should be up-wind as animals have an excellent sense of smell.

When you've found your hiding spot, spend a few minutes making it comfortable as you're likely to be there a while. Once you are settled, turn your attention to your camera and ready it for action. Set your exposure manually if you have that option and are confident enough to do so. Otherwise, set to the aperture priority mode. Select the widest aperture available as this will ensure you are using the fastest speed.

Set your camera to continuous shooting mode and remember to turn your camera to silent and turn off the flash. If you have a fast and reliable automatic focus you should use it, otherwise use the manual focus and keep your fingers ready on the dial.

When you're working with long focal lengths the slightest movement or vibration is magnified and you will experience some blurring as a result of camera shake. An image stabilising lens can help to reduce this effect but it is generally wise to use a tripod whenever possible.

The early morning or late afternoon light is not only perfect for photographing animals, but often it's the time when they are most active.

Waterways offer the photographer the added advantage of reflections that serve to increase interest and impact in a picture. When an animal drinks it is often at its most vulnerable and will look up. Focus on the eyes to ensure they are sharp and turn your camera to vertical and use the reflection to lead the eye toward your subject.

If you lack patience or if this method doesn't appeal to you, try heading to a National Park camping area. Animals in these areas are generally quite used to human ~~form~~ presence and will be less likely to take fright. Many species are also less frightened of the car than they are of the human ~~so~~ if you're lucky you may be able to capture some reasonable shots without much effort at all.

Zoos are a great place to capture the more exotic wildlife if travel is not in your future plans. Habitats created in the Zoo environment are much more natural these days and you can get a lot closer to your subject than you could expect to in the wild.

Be aware of any human elements in the scene and zoom in close in order to crop them out. These subjects will quite often lack the impact of their more timid counterparts but you can often use a bit of flash to improve lighting and with a bit of careful thought to composition it is possible to achieve some really nice images.





Part 10: Wildlife

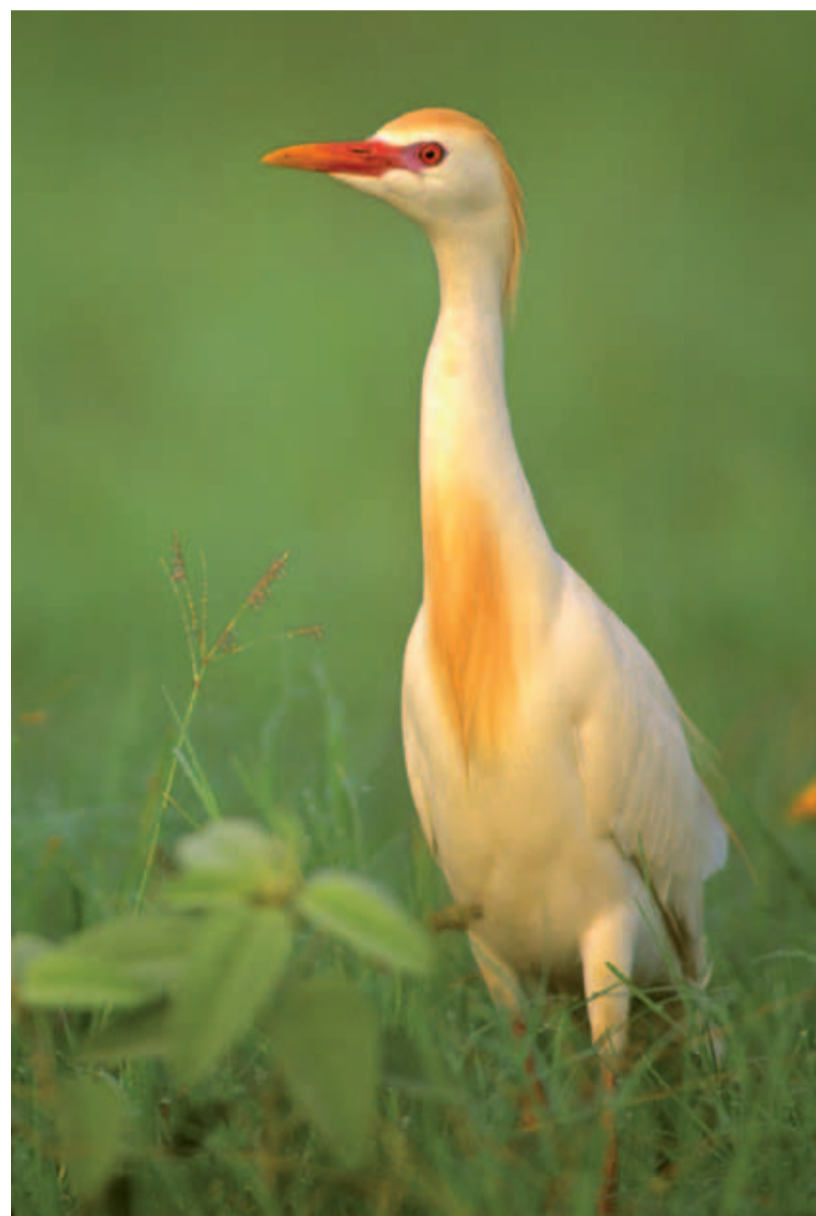
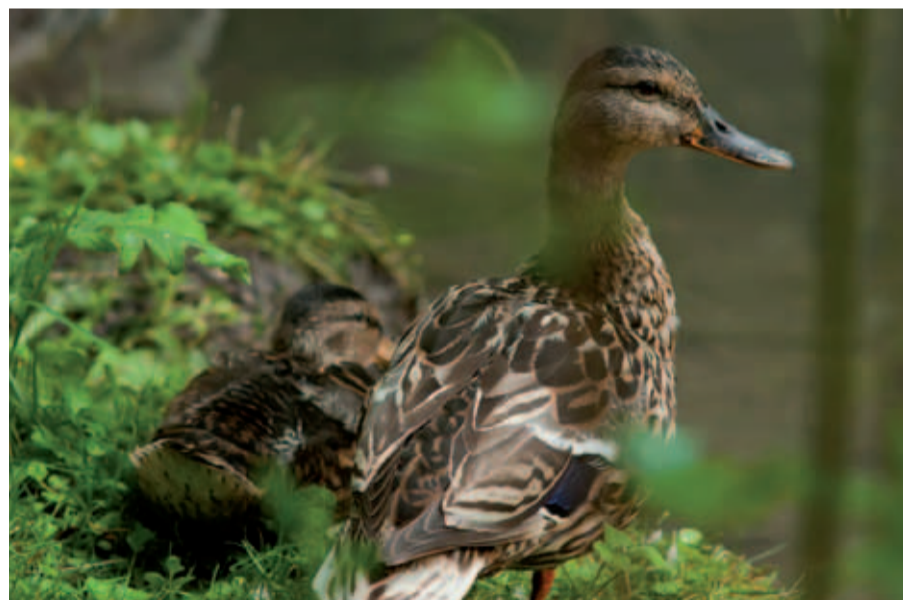
Photographing Birds

If you are looking for a truly challenging subject for your photographic repertoire, try bird photography. Smaller birds rarely sit still, fluttering of a few minutes from branch to branch and then they are gone. Many of the techniques for photographing animals also apply to birds, but ultimately, the better your understanding of the species the better the chances of success. Know when and where birds are likely to be found. Be prepared to be extremely patient and to put in a lot of hours.

Like animals, birds are creatures of habit, often returning to the same spots time and again. Getting to know these habits over time will reward you with some fantastic images and the more you return, the less timid your subjects will become as they get used to your presence.

Water birds make great subjects as they are often easier to sneak up on whilst they are absorbed in the task of cleaning themselves or finding food. Use a fast shutter to capture a bird which is splashing and utilise reflection when the water is still. Sea birds also make great subjects as they are in such abundance and less timid than most bird species.

For best results, photograph in the early morning or late afternoon and be very careful not to become obtrusive, especially when photographing nests as it's very easy to stress birds and cause devastating effects.



Put Your Best Image Forward

Email us the best wildlife photo you've taken. Files should be approx 1MB and received before deadline of 5pm Thursday. Entries can be emailed to photo@dailyexaminer.com.au. The best images will appear in the next installment of *Beginners' Guide to Digital Photography*, published on Monday 25th April. Prize for the best image each week will be a 7" Digital Photo Frame. All photographs appearing in the paper will win the photographer 50 free 6x4 prints in store at Harvey Norman Grafton. At the end of the course, the best image will win the photographer a Panasonic Digital SLR twin lens camera Kit (DMC-G10KTWIN) VALUED AT \$900.00. **ALL PRIZES COURTESY OF HARVEY NORMAN.**

