Issue 11 May/Jun 2015

WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHIC



HOW LOW CAN YOU GO?

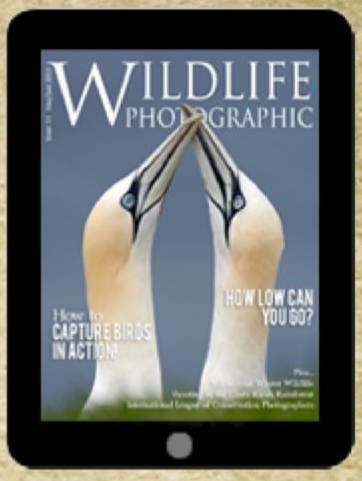
How to CAPTURE BIRDS IN ACTION!

Plus...
Yellowstone Winter Wildlife
Shooting in the Costa Rican Rainforest
International League of Conservation Photographers

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HOW TO READ THIS MAG



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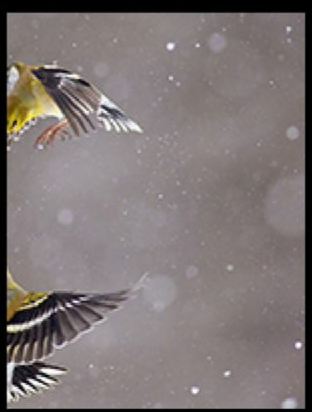
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Brad James

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Note from the editor



Bill Gozansky

Welcome to Issue 11 of *Wildlife Photographic*! I think you will find it one of our most content-rich and image-filled publications to date with over 100 pages of articles and imagery, four amazing new contributors, and tons of actionable advice and inspiration for your enjoyment. Let's take a look at what's inside …

Brad James, a wildlife photographer based in Newfoundland, Canada, takes the cover spot this issue with his stunning image of northern gannets. Brad asks, "How Low Can You Go?" as he shares with us some great advice on achieving a low-angle perspective in our wildlife photography.

Next, Marie Read, a New York-based photographer who specializes in birds and bird behavior, shares with us her insights and strategies for capturing birds in action. Her article, "Caught in the Act," gives us a detailed look at her approach—from the importance of understanding bird behavior to technical tips and camera settings—and I believe it provides some very useful takeaways that you can implement next time you are out in the field.

In this issue, we launch a new interview feature entitled "*Wildlife Photographic's* Q&A with …" This new series will feature a short, yet hopefully fun and insightful, interview with one of our favorite *WP* contributors each issue. We kick it off this month with "*WP*'s 10 Questions with Grant Atkinson," one of our veteran pro contributors from Cape Town, South Africa.

I'm very excited to introduce photographer Bill Lea to the *WP* audience. Bill Lea is perhaps best known for his captivating wildlife and landscape imagery of the Great Smoky Mountains and Florida Everglades. However, for this issue, Bill takes us out west to Yellowstone National Park during the heart of winter. He shares with us his recent experiences photographing winter wildlife in this extraordinary destination and briefs us on the opportunities and *challenges* that it presents.

Mario Davalos brings us "Close," the fourth installment of his *Collections* series. This series of wildlife portraits gets us face-to-face with some of nature's most magnificent creatures.Next, I'll introduce you to one of my favorite spots for bird and wildlife photography in northern Costa Rica, the Laguna del Lagarto Rainforest Lodge. This remote eco lodge is nestled among 1,250 acres of pristine tropical rainforest and offers a wonderful photographic experience for its guests.

Our conservation feature highlights the work of the International League of Conservation Photographers (iLCP), an organization that is truly putting imagery to work for conservation. The iLCP's mission is to "further environmental and cultural conservation through photography," and it demonstrates this with a story on the Mesoamerican Reef Expedition. Can photography really change the world? The iLCP is proving that it can!

Finally, our reader contribution this month comes from Ivan Cordero, a passionate wildlife photographer who lives in Puerto Rico. Ivan takes us back to the basics and reminds us of how little is actually required to enjoy wildlife photography. His essay provides a strong motivation to *just get out there and do it* and embrace the amazing benefits that nature photography can provide.

I want to thank you, our readers, for your continued support. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly with your story ideas, comments, and suggestions for future issues. I look forward to hearing from you.

Bill Gozansky

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Brad James



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WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHIC Q&A

with Grant Atkinson

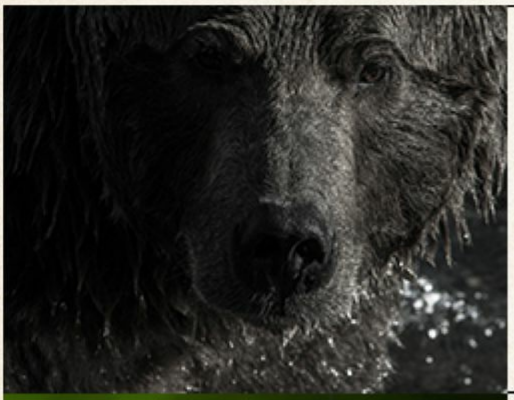


YELLOWSTONE WINTER WILDLIFE

Bill Lea

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COLLECTIONS, PART 4: CLOSE

Mario Davalos



PHOTO HOTSPOT: LAGUNA DEL LAGARTO LODGE, COSTA RICA

Bill Gozansky



CONSERVATION FEATURE:

iLCP

(International League of Conservation Photographers)



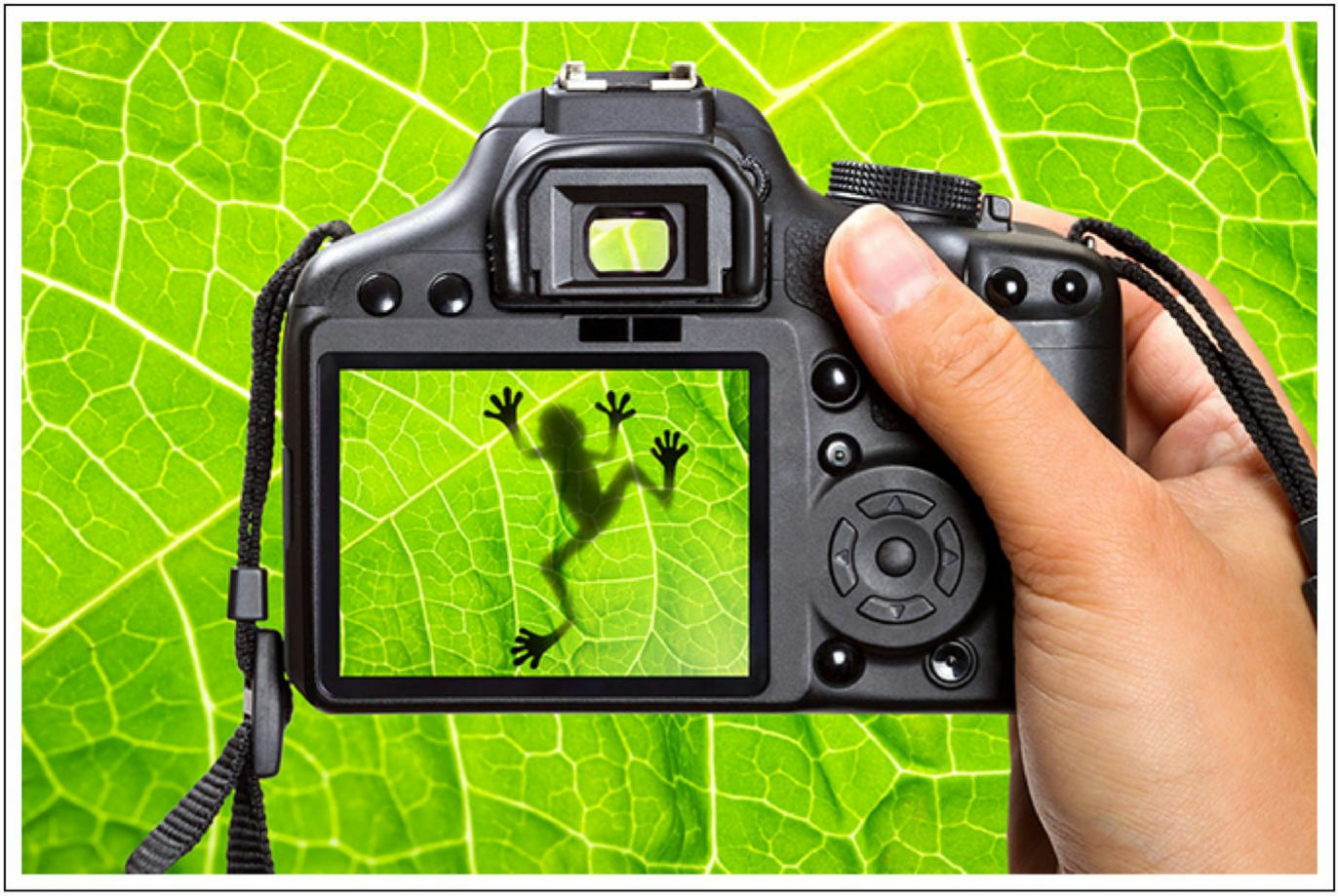
READER CONTRIBUTION: ENJOYING WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY

Ivan Cordero

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Have your best photos featured in Wildlife Photographic

If you have a passion for wildlife photography and you would like to share your images with others, then you could have your images published in *Wildlife Photographic* magazine!

Whether you are a budding amateur photographer who would like to see their favourite photo published or a professional photographer with tips and advice to share, we would love to hear from you. Your submission can be based on any topic relating to wildlife photography, including post production, as well as reviews of cameras, lenses and equipment.

What's more, as *WP* is fully interactive, we can also include links to your online gallery, blog, or website. This makes it incredibly easy for our readers to discover you and your work. It also allows professionals a platform to showcase the services and products they offer such as workshops, safaris, prints, or books.



Tap here to find out more

HOW LOW CAN YOU GO?

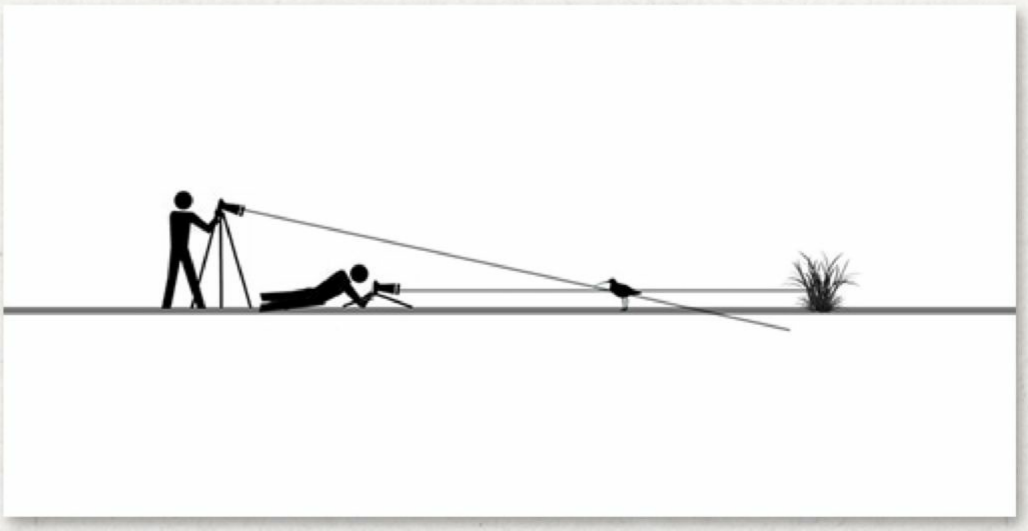
By Brad James

TAP IMAGES FOR info

As low as possible! Often when I'm out in the field, I see photographers at the edge of a pond or lake or in the middle of a field standing upright with their tripods extended and basically looking down on their subjects. Sure, their images are tack-sharp, but they always seem to lack something. For me, it's that intimate point of view that you achieve when you are down at the subject's level.

Depth of field is a key element in photography. When I first started wildlife photography, there were a number of people in the industry that I aimed to emulate, to capture images the way they did. One day, I sat down and stared at their photos, trying to figure out what it was that I liked so much. Then it hit me: It was the extreme low point of view at which they had captured their images. So that is what I set out to do. Whenever possible, I would get as low to the ground as I could.

Getting low has many advantages. One of the main advantages is that the background will be at a greater distance and, in turn, should create a more pleasing look. I put this illustration together to show what I mean.



As you can see, the angle that the photographer is shooting at will create an image with the ground as the background. Since the subject-to-ground distance is very short, it will cause an undesirable background in most cases and won't be as out-of-focus as we would like. Looking at the photographer laying down, you can see that the background in his image will be the distant grassy patch. Since the depth of field is so great, the background created will be much more desirable and pleasing to look at.

Here is an example from the field. (Funny enough, I had a hard time finding a shot where I wasn't laying down at that low angle!) Truthfully, even the shot shown below wasn't shot standing completely upright, but I think it illustrates my point. These shots where taken last year in Terrenceville, Newfoundland, when I came upon a killdeer (a species uncommon to the island) feeding on a grassy field down by the ocean. In the first image, you can see I was not low enough to create that distance between the subject and the background.



In this second image, you can clearly see I was able to get lower, which creates a much more desirable background.



Depending on the environment, getting down to your subjects level isn't always possible. I often find using a tripod limits the ability to get the extreme low angle I desire. So 90% of the time I shoot without one. When I do I use my Sirui R-3203 Carbon Fiber Tripod, its lack of a center column allows it to get very low to the ground.

An advantage of not using a tripod at all is that it will allow you to get even lower and give you the ability to create a beautiful out-of-focus foreground (if the elements are there to do so). You can see in the second previous image that I'm extremely low, basically laying the camera on the top part of my hand while it was pressed flat on the ground. Using the surrounding grass to create this creamy, smooth surrounding helped make the subject stand out even more.

Here is another example, this time with a red fox I encountered on a drive home from Terrenceville, Newfoundland, in July 2014. I spotted this very curious fox on the side of the road just outside a small town called Swift Current. Upon getting out of my vehicle, I could tell he had no fear of humans since he approached quickly, obviously looking for a handout. With only my 70-200mm F2.8 lens on, I grabbed a few shots in case the fox decided to run away.



This is your typical standing kind of shot. Looking down on the subject created no interest at all. You will also notice this little guy had one very unique feature—a lack of a tail. I'm not sure what happened, but he certainly was active and healthy-looking to me.

It was obvious he wasn't going far, so I switched to my 500mm F4 and got into my usual position flat on my belly. As he searched the area for food, he turned and made another approach toward me. (I guess he was curious as to why I was now laying on the ground.) That's when I captured the following image ...





I wish I had not clipped the fox's feet, but I still love this image. It gives you the feeling of a fox on the hunt, bringing you right into his world. Looking closely, you will notice the fox in both images has similar poses. But getting low and isolating the subject from the background created a much more pleasing image.

Depth of field is an interesting element to play with in photography, because it can dramatically change how an image looks. I prefer the lowest point of view possible, but that can change when certain elements are in play. Take, for example, water.

As you all know by now, getting low is the name of the game for me. But what about when it comes to water? No, no, I'm not worried about getting wet. Trust me, most of the time when I come home from being out in the field, I'm soaked and covered with dirt. The issue with water is the reflection.

It's a calm day, and you head out to your local pond. You take my advice and get right down at water level, pretty much with your elbows in it. Now you will have that low POV (point of view), creating that intimate look. But what about the reflection? Will the position create the reflection you want? Let's look at what I mean.

The bufflehead image below was taken at Virginia Lake, Newfoundland, a few years ago. I had positioned myself at the water's edge. It was an almost perfectly calm day (which is rare around here). Look at the reflection. Notice how the low angle compressed it? You barely see the Bufflehead's body in the reflection. I did nail the eye in the image, so that's a plus. But is this the look we want?



Let's look at another. In this shot, you can see that the eye is almost right next to the bird in the reflection. See how compressed it can be when you are so low to the water level?



So what do we do? We break the getting-low rule. We need to change our angle so that we are looking down into the water, our reflective glass in this case. In order to achieve the more full reflection, we need to sit up. If we stand, what will happen? The background (water in this case) will appear to be too close to the subject, and the steep viewing angle will create that undesired look we discussed in the diagram above. So I suggest sitting up or on your knees (which isn't comfortable, so wear knee pads if you decide to shoot this way).

Let’s look at a couple of shots where I was more upright. In this shot, a black-headed gull stood in a perfect autumn reflection. In order to have the full reflection in the shot, I had to adjust my position.









Your angle plays a huge part when it comes to water. A calm day plays an even bigger role, because you need that perfectly calm water to capture a reflection in.

Achieving that low point of view is one of the most important parts of wildlife photography in my eyes. It helps to separate the subject from the background, creates a more intimate image, and it helps our wildlife subjects feel more comfortable with our presence. But getting low might not always achieve the look you want.

So move around to find that perfect shot. A foot or two can make a huge difference!

Brad James



I'm a Technical Support Analyst living in Conception Bay South, Newfoundland. I've been doing wildlife photography for approximately five years and have to admit it has brought back the child in me. When I picked up my first digital camera, I was hooked. I began to realize the fulfillment I felt from being creative with the camera. Not owning a telephoto lens at the time presented a challenge as I wanted to get closer and capture the beauty of my subjects, study their behavior, and learn more about them. This was the beginning of my so-called addiction.

Connect with Brad James

CAUGHT IN THE ACT

Photo Strategies for Birds in Action

By Marie Read





One of my best bird action photographs was shot at 1/125 second on Kodachrome 64 film using a Nikon FE2 body, a manual-focus lens, and a motordrive whose performance today would seem painfully clunky. These days, that shutter speed and such slow film sound almost laughable, yet that image—a black-capped chickadee hovering on blurred wings to sip from a melting icicle—has been one of my top-selling photos.

TAP IMAGES FOR info

Advances in digital photography have opened up a world of high-speed photography that, using natural light, would have been next to impossible in the days of film. Today's cameras are capable of high ISOs (equivalent to "film speed") that allow super-fast shutter speeds. Many also have excellent noise reduction technology to counteract the digital equivalent of film grain. Couple that with ever-faster autofocus, more accurate focus tracking, and blazingly fast frame rates, and the end-result is that we can now portray birds frozen in the midst of activities that can be over in the blink of an eye!



Of course, it takes more than modern camera equipment and knowing how to use it to get these dramatic images. You also need opportunities—places to go where there is plenty of bird activity and good field strategies once you're there. And you need persistence, quick reflexes, and knowledge of bird behavior.

To help you get started, I'd like to share some of the strategies I use for capturing birds in action.

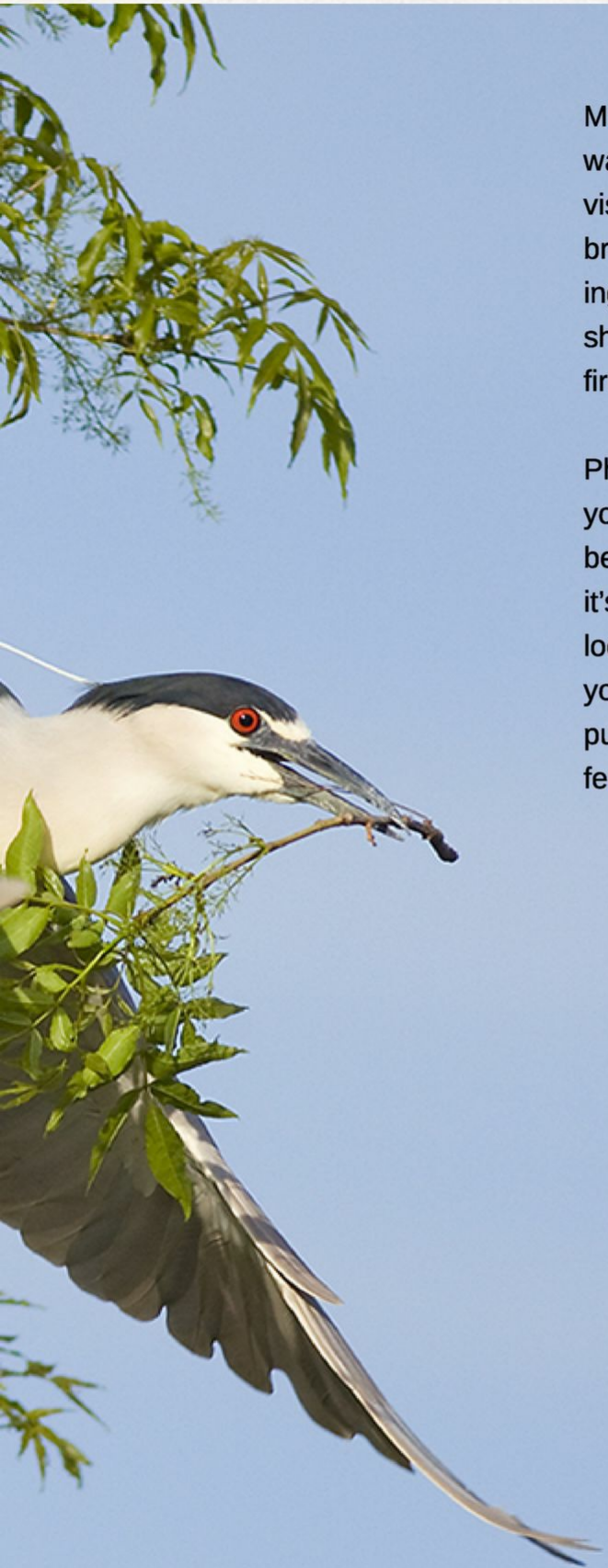
Find opportunities by noticing activity patterns

The Internet is full of information about well-known bird photography hotspots, as well as workshops and photo tours that promise to put you in the right place at the right time in great locations worldwide. But we don't all have the luxury of travelling to photograph birds. Fortunately, by spending a little time you can find opportunities in your own area, in local parks or nature centers—or even in your own backyard!

Birds are creatures of habit. They often return repeatedly to a source of food or nesting material, to a favorite perch or roosting spot, or take the same flight path when flying to and from their nests. These predictable activities are photo opportunities waiting to happen! In fact, it was by noticing a behavior pattern that netted me that chickadee photo so long ago. The icicle had formed when a branch broke during an ice storm, formed in the tree where my backyard bird feeder was hanging. I noticed the tiny birds coming for a snack sometimes snatched a quick drink afterwards. Then it was a matter of sitting and waiting (for many hours!) with my lens focused on the tip of the icicle.







More recently, in a suburban park in California I watched a black-crowned night-heron repeatedly visiting one particular tree on the shore of a pond, breaking off twigs for nest material, and then heading back to its nest on a small island. I framed the shot with the bird slightly to the left of center and fired off a burst off shots when it took wing.

Photo ops like this are all around you. Explore your favorite birding spots, keeping a lookout for behavior patterns to take advantage of, whether it's the flocks of ducks you've noticed courting on a local pond each spring, the nest-building swallows you've seen gathering mud from a roadside puddle, or the birds flying to and from your bird feeder.

Birds in Flight

Photographing flying birds is very exciting, but it may be difficult and frustrating at first. Your skills will improve with experience, so don't get disheartened. Start out by practicing with fairly slow-flying birds such as Canada geese at a local park or gulls flying around at the beach. Beginning photographers often try to focus on a bird that's already too close. It's easier to focus on a more distant bird you see approaching and try to keep it in the frame as it flies closer. The more you practice, the better you'll become at quickly acquiring focus on the bird and "panning" with it—smoothly swinging the lens around while maintaining focus and keeping it in the frame as it flies past. Your strength and reflexes will get a workout too!

Optimize your camera's performance

To improve your chances of getting sharp images of flying birds (and this applies also to birds running, swimming, or otherwise moving fast), select camera settings that will help you take full advantage of your camera's auto focus (AF) system. I use Canon EOS 7D II and EOS 5D III bodies and recommend the following for birds in flight. I set all these parameters before heading out to my field site. That way, once I'm in place and the action begins, I won't be trying to switch settings in a panic and possibly making errors!



Stability vs. mobility: Know when to ditch your tripod!

An important issue is whether or not to use a camera support when trying to photograph birds in flight. Until a few years ago, I'd always used a tripod to support my equipment, something I still do if I'm critically composing an image or when I need to hold focus on a bird until the decisive moment, such as a stalking heron finally stabbing a fish. But once I got hooked on shooting birds in flight, I soon discovered that, if the action was fast and furious, I got less frustrated and had better luck by switching to a shorter, hand-held lens instead of my heavy 500mm on a tripod. Hand-holding gives you mobility so you can more easily pan with your subject wherever it flies. In this case, a fast shutter speed is essential for sharp photos. I use a very lightweight Canon 400mm f/5.6 for flight shots. To comfortably carry the camera/lens combo so it's ready for action, I use a quick-access, cross-body camera strap (brand Black Rapid®).

Hand-holding my gear has netted me some exciting images, one of the most memorable being fighting limpkins. Once when walking along a dirt road through a Florida wetland, I started hearing limpkins calling loudly from both sides. Suddenly a pair of them emerged from the roadside reeds while at the same time a second pair appeared on the opposite side ...

Optimize your camera's performance

AF operation and drive modes: *AI Servo, high-speed continuous.*

AF point/area. Rather than select a single AF point, I prefer AF point expansion for moving subjects. Canon offers two options: 1 central point plus 4 adjacent points in a cross-shape (total 5) or 1 central point plus all surrounding adjacent points (total 9). I use the former, but either choice is a lot more forgiving than struggling to keep a single point centered on the flying bird's head or neck. If the bird's flight path is especially erratic (such as with flying nighthawks, swifts, or small terns), instead of manually setting an AF area you may find it easier to switch to 65-point automatic selection (61 in 5D III). In this option, the entire AF area is used to focus and the camera automatically selects the active point(s) based on where the subject is in the frame.

Use Canon's powerful AF Configuration Tool to fine-tune how AF performs in different situations. You can choose between several "cases,"preset combinations of 3 parameters: Tracking sensitivity,



Seconds later, I was in the midst of a territorial battle between the two males. Normally elusive birds, the limpkins chased each other up and down the road for more than ten minutes, sometimes scuffling briefly in midair, apparently quite oblivious to my presence. My lightweight hand-held gear gave me the mobility to keep focused on the fast action and let me quickly change my position when needed. I would have missed many shots if I'd been constrained by a tripod.



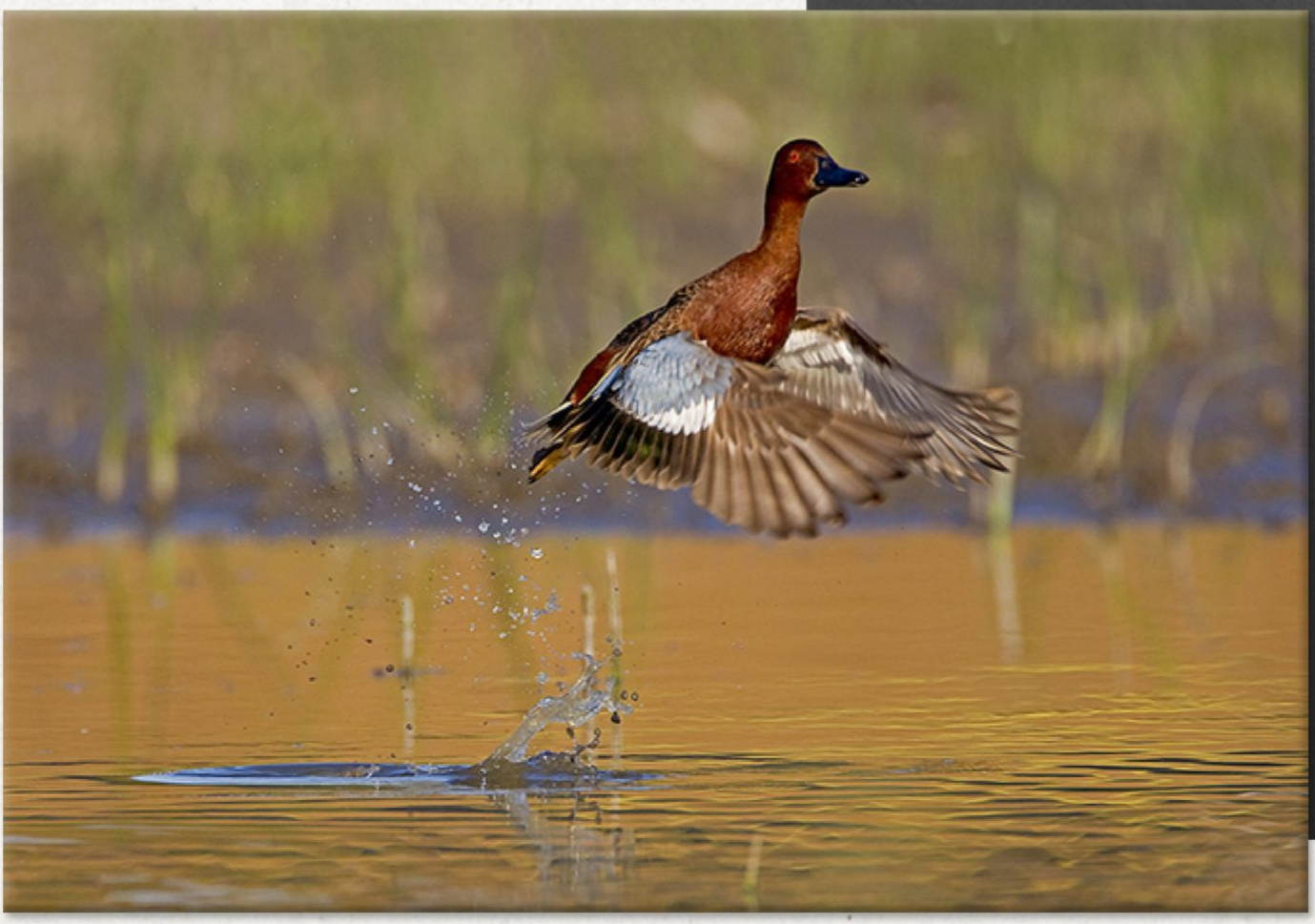
Anticipate the action by reading birds' behavior cues

Birds often give subtle cues—biologists call them intention movements—that something is about to happen. Taking flight is a good example. Perched birds, from eagles to egrets, signal they're about to fly by crouching and/or defecating. Cranes lean forward slowly, "craning" their necks before running across the water to lift off. Ducks and geese flip their heads agitatedly before jumping off the water. If you notice these cues, get ready! Focus on the bird's head or neck, keep your finger on the shutter button, watch through the viewfinder, and wait. Begin firing as soon as the bird takes off, and try to keep it in the frame by panning along with it as it flies.

Optimize your camera's performance

Acceleration/deceleration tracking, and AF point auto switching. You can customize any or all of the cases as you wish. For birds in action, I keep my camera set on one of the cases that I've customized as follows:

***Tracking Sensitivity** – This lowest setting (-2) is least responsive, meaning focus remains locked onto the subject regardless of whether the AF point(s) briefly move off it or an obstacle (such as a foreground or back ground distraction) appears in the frame.*



Don't lose your concentration

Bathing and preening waterfowl make very photogenic subjects, but for true drama stay focused on the bird until it finishes its body care ritual, because it will usually rise up in the water and flap its wings. Your ability to concentrate will be tested, but it's worth the wait. Be sure to frame the shot with space above the bird or you may clip off the wing tips. Avocets and other shorebirds often end their preening bouts with an elegant stretch, wings up, head down, whereas preening swallows often perform a graceful downward wing stretch, spreading all their beautiful wing and tail feathers. For the latter, leave space at the bottom of the frame to include the entire wing.



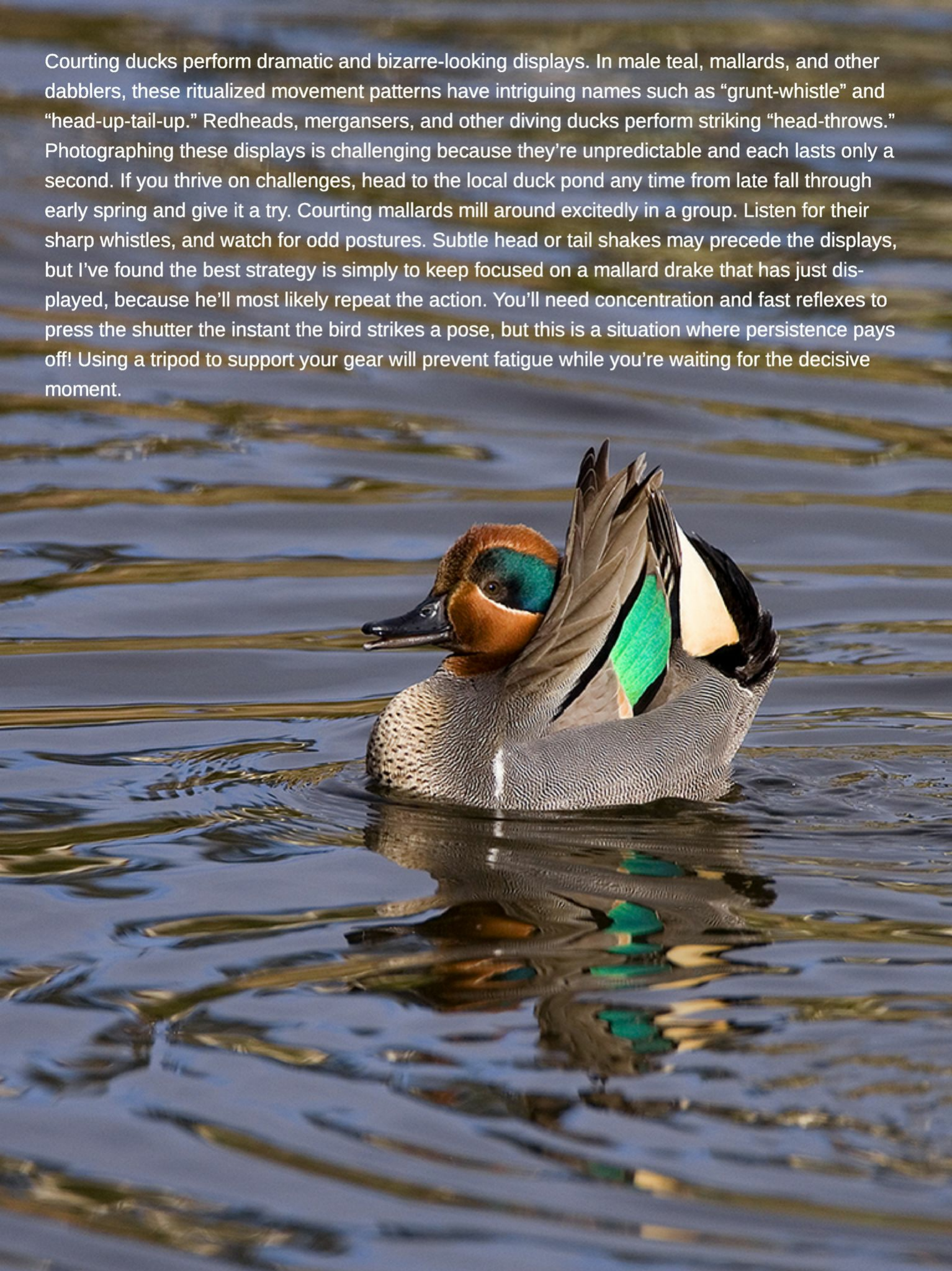
Optimize your camera's performance

Acceleration/Deceleration Tracking *– This highest setting (2) allows the camera to accurately track a moving subject even if it frequently changes speed.*

AF Point Auto Switching *– This highest setting (2) is especially useful when using 65-point automatic AF point selection. It's the most responsive setting, meaning AF point switching functions at its fastest, detecting even slight changes in focus or subject location in the frame.*

Shutter Speed/Aperture/ISO: *For birds in action, shutter speed matters more than depth of field. I shoot in Manual mode, usually with the aperture wide open. (If you prefer an automatic mode, choose Aperture Priority – AV in Canon cameras). I select an ISO that will give me a shutter speed of at least 1/500 second. If the lighting is adequate, I prefer shutter speeds of 1/1250 second or higher.*

Courting ducks perform dramatic and bizarre-looking displays. In male teal, mallards, and other dabblers, these ritualized movement patterns have intriguing names such as “grunt-whistle” and “head-up-tail-up.” Redheads, mergansers, and other diving ducks perform striking “head-throws.” Photographing these displays is challenging because they’re unpredictable and each lasts only a second. If you thrive on challenges, head to the local duck pond any time from late fall through early spring and give it a try. Courting mallards mill around excitedly in a group. Listen for their sharp whistles, and watch for odd postures. Subtle head or tail shakes may precede the displays, but I’ve found the best strategy is simply to keep focused on a mallard drake that has just displayed, because he’ll most likely repeat the action. You’ll need concentration and fast reflexes to press the shutter the instant the bird strikes a pose, but this is a situation where persistence pays off! Using a tripod to support your gear will prevent fatigue while you’re waiting for the decisive moment.



Prefocus where you expect the action to occur

In a predictable situation, such as a bird returning again and again to the same spot, try prefocusing on that spot then capturing the bird in midair as it flies in or just as it lands. Cavity nesting birds, such as tree swallows or bluebirds flying to a nestbox, are good examples. Set up for a side view and prefocus on the center of the entrance hole. Frame the shot with the hole off-center, then release the shutter as the bird flies into the frame.

This method works with perches, too. Many birds, including spoonbills, herons, flycatchers, and hawks, have regularly-used perches from which they watch for prey or rest and preen. For backyard songbirds, try setting up your own perch a short distance from your backyard sunflower seed feeders and fire away as the birds take off from it to the feeder.





Be aware, though, that prefocusing will be most successful when your chosen spot is the bird's only option and when your plane of focus is parallel to its flight path. If your camera tries to focus in and out, try switching to manual focus. Use a fast shutter speed and stop down the lens aperture (f/8, for instance) to improve the chance of a keeper.

I used the "prefocus and wait" strategy to capture American goldfinches fighting in midair. They're gregarious birds, but they often bicker with each other at my bird feeders, sometimes flying up grappling with each other in midair. Working from a blind with tripod-mounted gear, I focused manually on a small feeder just below the bottom of the frame. Since I never knew where in the frame the birds might end up, I framed the shot with plenty of space above the feeder and cropped later during post-processing. To ensure the bird were in the original plane of focus, I tried to release the shutter immediately as the birds flew up fighting, something that took considerable powers of concentration and quick reaction times. To portray a special mood, I shot only on days when snow was falling. In these gloomy light conditions, I chose an ISO in the 1250-2500 range to give me the 1/2500 second shutter speed needed to render the birds sharp. Even so, only a handful of the hundreds of images I shot over several days were to my liking.

Go for it!

Digital technology has given bird photographers the freedom and confidence to take photographic risks with fast moving subjects. I take chances as never before—swooping swallows, erratically flying nighthawks, terns fighting in midair or shaking in flight after diving for fish, even natural-light images of flying hummingbirds.

But you cannot win if you do not play. So go for it! What's to lose by trying to focus on a moving bird at any opportunity? Digital frames are cheap and there's always the Delete key! Plus, by constantly trying, you're honing your reflexes and concentration skills, so you'll be primed for the next time you're in the midst of some exciting action. Embrace the challenge, and enjoy the adrenaline rush when you've captured something great!



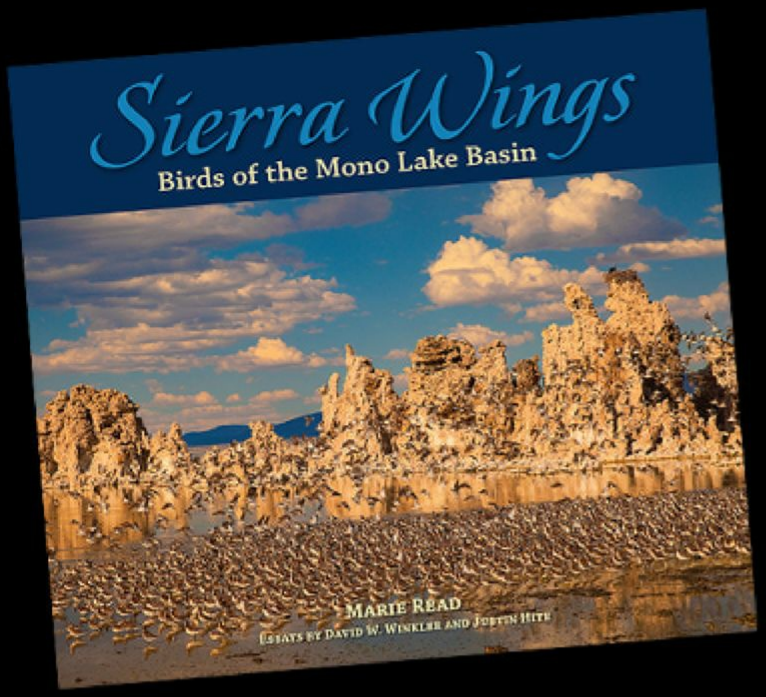


Marie Read



Bird photographer/writer Marie Read grew up in England, began wildlife photography in Kenya, and lives in central New York state. She has traveled throughout North America, as well as to Central America and Australia, in search of subjects. Her images and articles have appeared in magazines such as *Living Bird, Bird Watching, Nature's Best, National Wildlife,* and *National Geographic,* plus books and calendars worldwide. She is the author of four books, including most recently *Sierra Wings: Birds of the Mono Lake Basin* and *Into The Nest* (co-authored with Laura Erickson).

Connect with
Marie Read



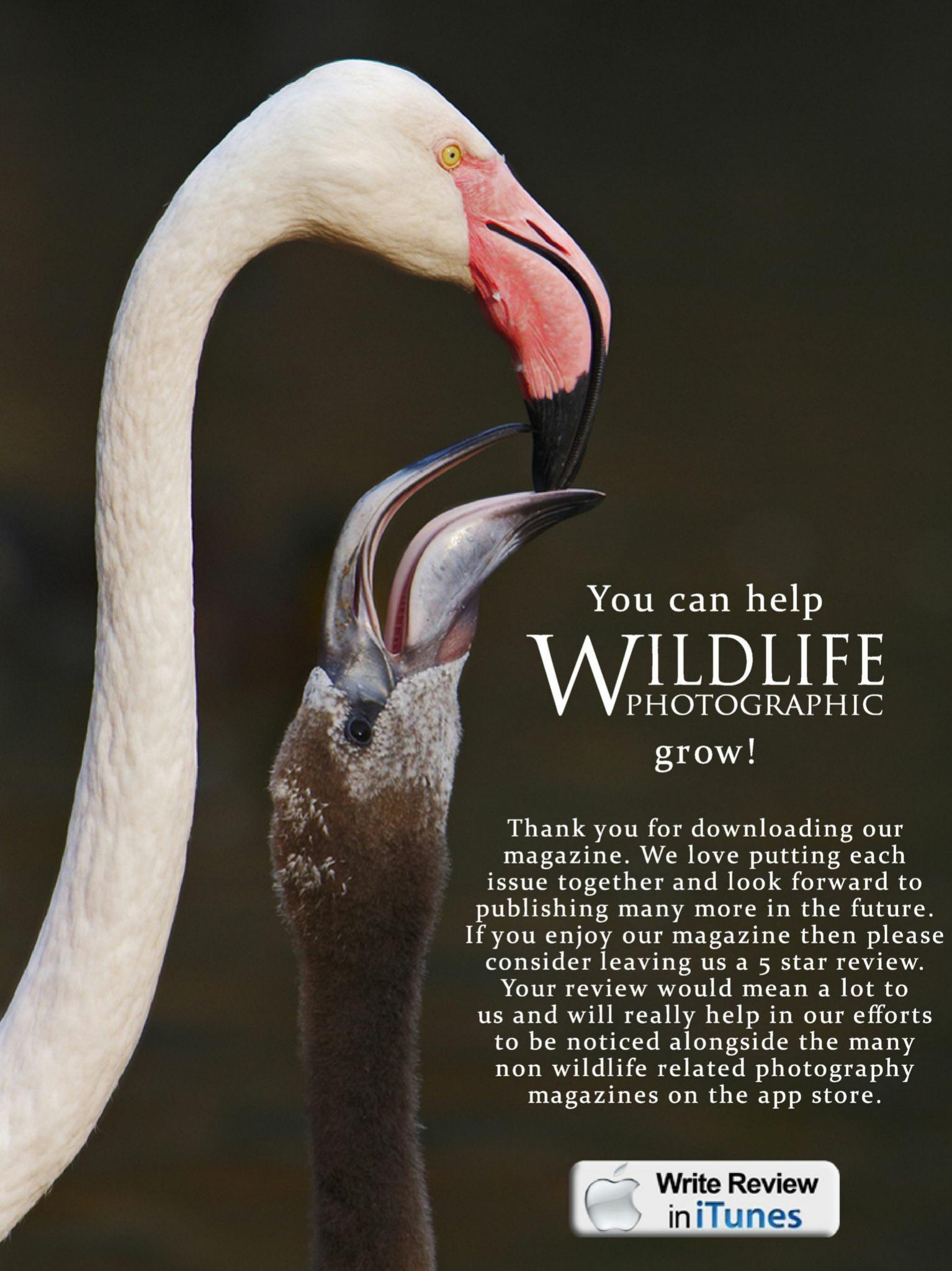
Sierra Wings: Birds of the Mono Lake Basin is a beautiful new book celebrating the birds of California's Mono Lake and the diverse habitats around it. Famed for its salty, alkaline water and bizarre tufa towers, Mono Lake attracts vast numbers of breeding and migratory birds each year. Includes stunning photography by renowned wildlife photographer, Marie Read and essays by Cornell University biologists David W. Winkler and Justin Hite. 124 full color pages, including map of birding hotspots.

Click on the cover above to learn more and order your signed copy!

Marie Read



Marie Read's popular programs about birds, bird natural history, and bird photography are always well received. Entertaining and information-packed, her presentations strike the perfect balance between stunning imagery and natural history. Contact Marie through her website if your club or organization would like to book Marie as a speaker.



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Wildlife Photographic Q&A with ...

In the first of our new Q&A features, we shoot our ten quick-fire questions to South African wildlife photographer and regular *WP* contributor Grant Atkinson.

Grant Atkinson



Grant Atkinson is a guide, a wildlife photographer and a writer. He lives with his wife Helena in Cape Town.

His images have been on the cover of both Africa Geographic and the US National Geographic Kids magazine. He is a regular contributor of text and images to Africa Geographic, Africa Birds and Birding and Pix magazine.

WP: What is the one lens you'd take with on a deserted island? (Well, not necessarily an "island" habitat, but essentially your favorite lens if you had to narrow it down to just one.)

GRANT: For the kind of wildlife photography that I do, if I could only have one lens, it would be the new Canon EF 100-400L f4.5-5.6 IS II. It focuses fast and produces images that are sharp enough for my needs in a fairly compact, lightweight package that is built tough for hard, outdoor use. With such a wide zoom range, I find it very flexible for photographing action, and it is light enough to make it ideal for handheld shooting, which is my preference.

WP: What is one item you have in your camera bag that might surprise us?

GRANT: It might be surprising to some that I choose to keep a Canon 7D Mark II (which is an APS-C sensor camera) in my bag, along with a pair of full-frame bodies. As I often photograph birds that may be small in the frame, the fine pixel pitch of the 7D Mark II allows me to come away with higher resolution images that I may have had to crop too much if I was using my regular 5D Mark III bodies. That may change when the 5Ds is released.

WP: Will you give us a virtual look inside your camera bag?

GRANT: My camera bag is usually packed for work, which almost always translates into meeting airline baggage size restrictions. Everything important has to fit inside. As a Canon shooter, I typically pack two Canon 5D Mark III bodies along with a 7D MARK II body. For lenses, I take an EF 100-400L f4.5-5.6 IS II to cover zoom requirements. For more magnification, I have a Canon EF 500L f4 IS II (with the lens hood removed for travel and in my checked luggage) and an EF 17-40 L f4 wide-angle zoom. Having three bodies gives me security if something happens to one. All the bodies share one battery size.





WP: Will you share one of your images with us that you really enjoy and tell us why you like it (or the story behind the capture)?

GRANT: African wild dogs are known to be very successful hunters, and they hunt in daylight, which is helpful for photography. However, they run so fast that it can be very difficult to keep up with them when they are hunting, let alone have enough time to photograph a hunt. On this occasion, I got lucky when the kudu antelope turned and ran towards my position, enabling me to get this frame with both predator and prey in a deadly race. At the last moment, the kudu took to the water for refuge.



WP: Tell us about the shot you missed, the one image that "got away" and still haunts you.

GRANT: I have an entire folder inside my head of wildlife images that I have missed! Once I missed photographing two leopards leaping, one at a time, over a channel of deep water in the Okavango Delta. At the time, I got my vehicle stuck in the water as I approached and could only watch the leaping cats through a screen of branches and leaves.

WP: What are your top-five wildlife photography destinations?

GRANT: In no particular order, they are Okavango Delta (Botswana), Linyanti/Chobe River area (Botswana), Masai Mara (National Reserve and community conservancies), Mashatu Game Reserve (Botswana), and Malamala (in the Sabi Sands Game Reserve, South Africa).

WP: What is one place you haven't been where you would like to go photograph wildlife?

GRANT: There are many places I would still like to photograph wildlife, but perhaps the Kamchatka Peninsula (far eastern Russia) would be top of the list. Fantastic scenery, as well as bears, wolves, wolverines, and rich bird life, make it attractive to me.

WP: Can you give our readers one tip to help them become better wildlife photographers?

GRANT: The one single thing that I find helps me get the kind of wildlife photographs I'm looking for is patience. Finding a suitable subject is difficult, but waiting for it to do something special sometimes takes lots of patience. I almost always find that my patience is rewarded by nature.

WP: Can you recommend one of your favorite items of photography-related gear (e.g., photo equipment, a book, a software tool) for our readers?

GRANT: Adobe Lightroom (or Adobe Bridge and Camera Raw) really helps me get my raw images downloaded, sorted, and edited quickly and efficiently. The Adobe raw processing engine allows me to maximize the quality of my images, and this is especially true at times when I may be shooting images in ambient light that might be far less than perfect.

WP: Tell us about something you are working on (i.e., a project, book, upcoming workshop) that you'd like to promote.

GRANT: I am always looking to spend as much time as I can in places where there is spectacular wildlife viewing and high-quality photographic opportunities. Right now, the private conservancies alongside Kenya's Masai Mara offer some of the best lion and cheetah viewing anywhere. I will be back there in September 2015 and February 2016 to lead small, private groups of photographers. Please visit my website for more information.

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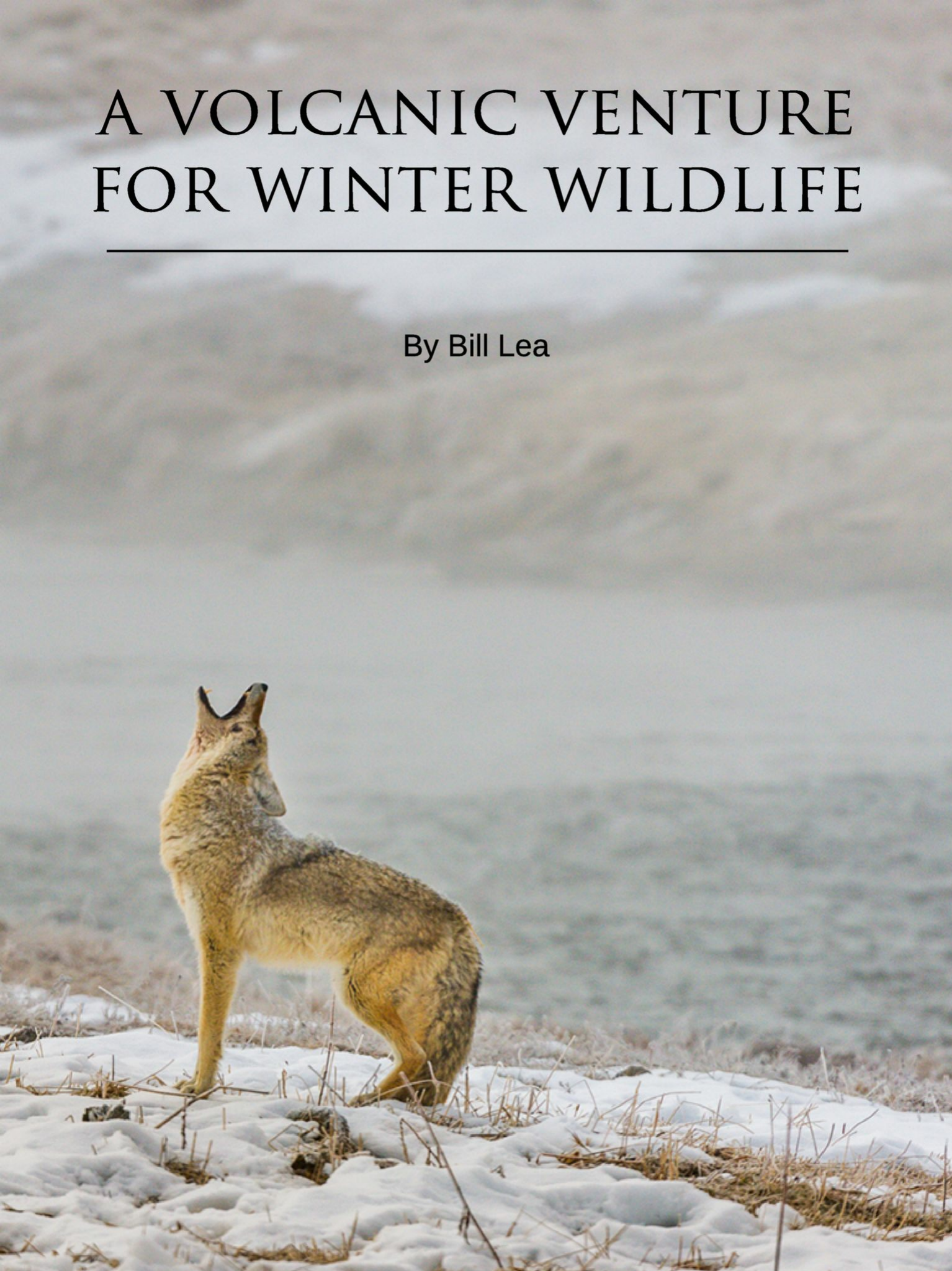
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A VOLCANIC VENTURE FOR WINTER WILDLIFE

By Bill Lea



To what extreme would you venture to capture outstanding wildlife images? Would you be willing to enter the caldera of an active volcano? Would you risk it? Although it is not nearly as dangerous as it sounds, a vast array of wildlife subjects can be found and photographed amongst the hot springs, fumaroles, and geysers of Yellowstone National Park, a still vibrant volcano. At the time of this writing, I have just returned from co-leading a Winter Photo Tour to Yellowstone and the Grand Tetons where we photographed bighorn sheep, bison, bobcats, coyotes, elk, moose, mule deer, pronghorn antelope, red fox, and, of course, some spectacular scenery along the way. It was fabulous. Everything looks great in snow, but photographer beware! One must be well-prepared for photographing wildlife in the sometimes-harsh conditions of a Yellowstone winter, but it is worth the effort!

You should begin by having the right clothes to keep yourself as warm and dry as possible. Dress in layers and make sure you wear water-proof outer-layer pants of some kind. The pants should include a gator you can tuck into a high boot so snow does not creep in, leaving you with wet and cold feet. The boots need to be warm enough to protect your feet from sub-zero degree temperatures. Warm, but functional gloves are a must. A cold and miserable photographer usually lacks the patience it takes to return home with great wildlife images.



My camera equipment has functioned surprisingly well in cold temperatures. During a trip to Yellowstone several years ago, temperatures never rose any higher than 17 degrees below zero. However, no wind and low humidity made it more than tolerable. I have been much colder photographing on Clingmans Dome in the Smokies with temperatures in the thirties than I was in the sub-zero temperatures of Yellowstone. This most recent trip to Yellowstone and the Grand Tetons saw temperatures reach unusual February highs in the forties. You never know what you will encounter weather-wise, but be prepared for the worse and welcome the best.

From an equipment standpoint, I only made some minor adjustments for the winter conditions. I kept a couple of fully charged spare camera batteries in the pockets of my inner-layer clothing. Additionally, I used high-capacity cards so I did not have to change cards any more than necessary while in the field. Gloves and numb fingers can make switching cards rather slow and cumbersome in the cold. And finally, I kept a waterproof lens and camera cover readily available for photographing wildlife in falling snow.

Once you are prepared from a clothing and camera gear standpoint, you must determine how you are going to access Yellowstone. The Park Service keeps the road from Gardiner through Lamar Valley to the Cooke City entrance open for private vehicle traffic. Four-wheel drive will allow you access along this approximate 54-mile route throughout the winter. Tire chains could come in handy on occasion, and once in a while the road might be inaccessible during a severe snow storm, but not often on either count. The gamble is worth it. Along this route, you may encounter just about any kind of wildlife ranging from bison and coyotes to elk and wolves. The only exception is bears, since they are normally asleep in their winter dens (but it's not totally impossible).

Your only real choice for accessing the interior of Yellowstone in winter is by snow coach or snowmobile. We chose the snow coach alternative for the ease of carrying all our camera gear and for the benefit of warmth while traveling from one location to another. If at all possible, you should go with a group of some kind where everyone is interested in winter wildlife photography. Otherwise, you will not spend enough time where you want to be and you will spend too much time where you don't want to be. Make sense? It will, but you don't want to find out the hard way!

Now let's cover the fun part: actually photographing wildlife. The image I most often imagined prior to our trip was a big, frost-and-snow-covered bison encased by steam from a hot spring and from his very own breath. Well, I didn't get it—but I came close. The dream of a big bison covered in frost came true on several occasions, but what I never expected was to capture a bison jumping a fence in snow!





When photographing bison, you need to keep several things in mind. First, bison may look slow, but they are not! Maintain a safe distance. Fortunately they are large, so you can stay back and still fill your frame with a long lens. Watch their body language and remember this: If their tail is up, then you should giddy-up and retreat, but never run (from them or any animal).



Photographing a dark animal like a bison, a moose, or a black wolf (nothing wrong with dreaming, because it is possible) in white snow can be challenging. You want enough light to show detail in the dark hairs, but not so much light as to blow-out the snow. I find overcast conditions work best. And mid-day sun? Well, it's not so good. When I have a promising situation, I usually take a quick image with my aperture set where I want it (normally around f/5.6) and my shutter speed set where my matrix meter reading indicates for the existing light conditions. If the shutter speed is not as fast as I want it, I increase my ISO. For wildlife photography, a camera with low-noise/high-ISO capability is a must. I take the image and look at my histogram. I adjust the shutter speed so the curve comes as far to the right as possible without touching the edge, assuming there are no specular highlights reflected in the snow. I always shoot in manual exposure and make my adjustments accordingly. You, of course, need to do what works best for you.

When photographing wildlife, wherever it may be, I think there are some important basics you need to constantly keep in mind. First, I always suggest shooting from a low position. When our tripod legs are fully extended and we stand upright to photograph, the resultant image comes from a human perspective. By getting down low and shooting eye-level or slightly upwards, we enter our subjects' world. We see them from their perspective. All of this means you need to be shooting most of the time from your knees, and thus you need waterproof pants for photographing wildlife in the winter snow of Yellowstone.

When photographing wildlife, I cannot emphasize enough the need to pay special attention to backgrounds regardless of season or place. Backgrounds make or break the image. Sometimes a slight move to the right or left will result in a totally different setting for your subject. One of the reasons I love photographing wildlife in winter is the simplicity of a pure snow background. It focuses all of the viewer's attention on the subject—like the red fox in snow. Such a background compliments the beauty of the subject rather than distracting from it.





Nearly all of us who photograph wildlife seek opportunities to capture wildlife behavior. I believe the secret is to anticipate behavior before it happens. That means knowing your subject, and you can best accomplish that through keen observation. Animals, like people, are often creatures of habit. We tend to repeat actions and behave in predictable ways. So do birds and animals. Careful observation, anticipation, and readiness all play a role in returning home with the action and behavioral wildlife images so many of us want.

Of course, I can never emphasize enough the importance light plays when taking any kind of photograph. To move from simply documenting to creating wildlife art, I suggest normally avoiding “contrasty” light. Harsh light makes busy backgrounds even busier. Oftentimes, knowing when not to take a photograph can be as important as knowing when to take an image. When the light is magical—shoot away! Everything looks fabulous in the right light.









Unquestionably, photographing winter wildlife in Yellowstone can present an array of opportunities and challenges. The cold weather, the right clothes, equipment modifications, correct exposures, and fundamentally proper wildlife photography techniques all come into play. But when you find a frost-encrusted bison walking towards you, a moose browsing on an aspen branch, a coyote howling to the pack, or a red fox leaping from a snow bank directly in front of your camera, you quickly realize the opportunities make all the challenges more than worthwhile. Only then do you truly understand that venturing into the caldera of an active volcano to photograph winter wildlife is exactly what you needed to make your life a little more exciting.





Bill Lea



Capturing intimate images of wildlife and landscapes in "just the right light" has long been the trademark of Bill's photography. He may best be known for his artistic documentation of bear behavior, the Great Smoky Mountains, and the Florida Everglades. He has been leading photo workshops since 1992. More than 7,000 of Bill's photos have been published. He has authored three coffee-table books and co-authored others. His most popular book, *Cades Cove – Window to a Secret World*, is in its fourth printing and his newest book, *The Everglades – Where Wonders Only Whisper*, is now available. Bill spends most of his time advocating on behalf of black bears.

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Bill Lea

Bio Image credit: Chris Norcott

Bill Lea - Nature Photography
Photo Tours & Workshop Schedule

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Black Bear Photo Tour
August 13-17, 2015 or August 20-24, 2015





Western North Carolina Foto Fest
September 10-13, 2015





Cades Cove & Great Smoky Mountains
September 17-20, 2015





Winter in Yellowstone & Grand Tetons
January 23-31, 2016





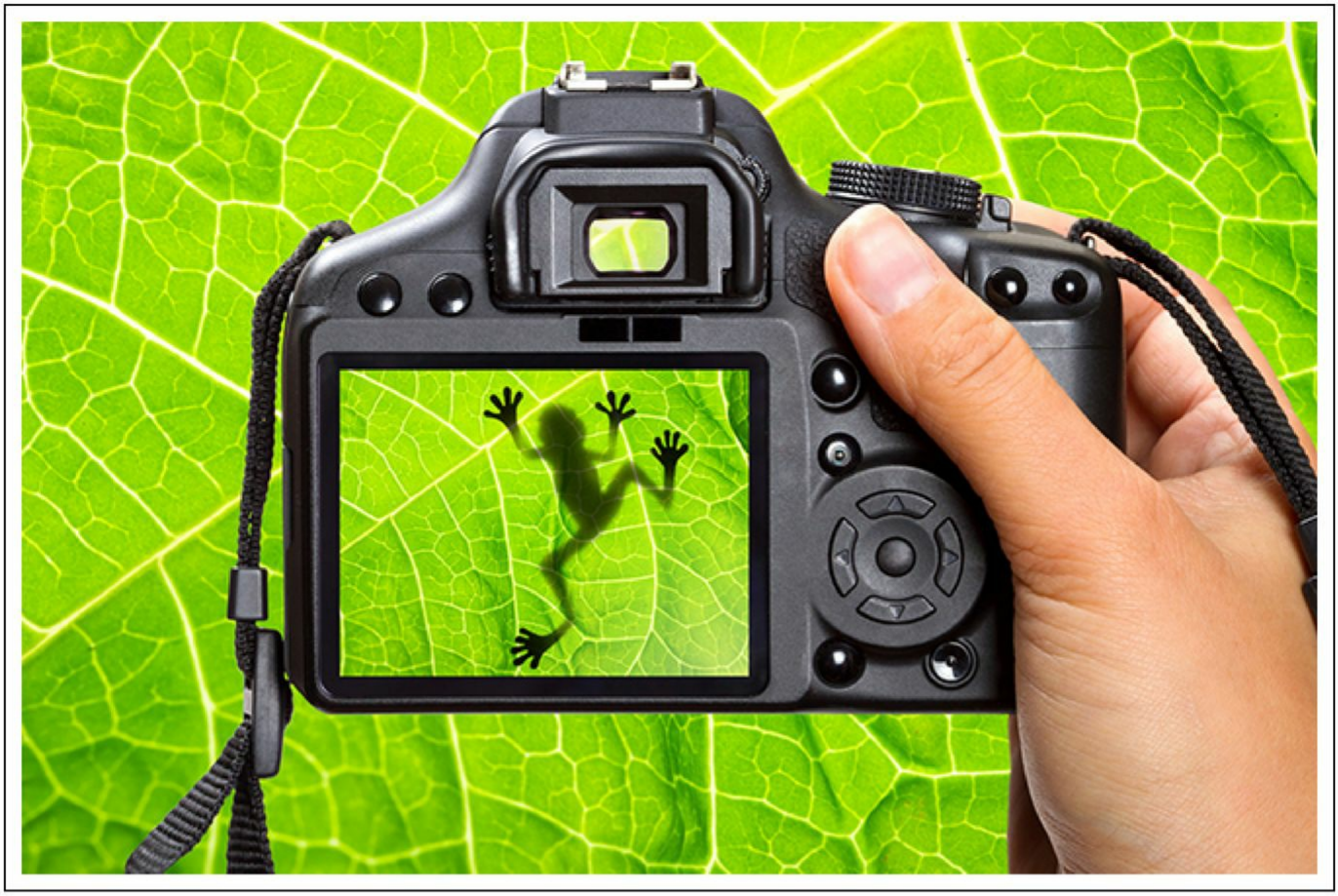
Everglades Photo Tour
February 25-28, 2016





Lake Clark Grizzly Bear Photo Tour
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CLOSE

(COLLECTIONS: PART 4)

By Mario Davalos



The first time I grabbed a camera more than 20 years ago was to take a portrait of my boxer Chili. Until I sat down to write this, I've never thought much about it, but retrospectively I think that making a portrait of my dog in 1994 somehow connects to the fact that I am a wildlife photographer today. The definition of portrait has remained intact over thousands of years and so has its relevance all the way to the infamous "selfie."

A quick browse through art history will certainly show the importance of the portrait; from Rembrandt to Chuck Close, from Arcimboldo to Bacon, portraits are some of the most iconic artistic works of humanity. This format is deeply embedded in our collective and creative DNA. So naturally when I started to seriously focus on wildlife photography, I decided that a series of portraits was a good idea.

But there is something more primitive about this. "Close" is a testament of our fascination with animals, their feathers and fur, colors and designs. We are naturally drawn to getting as close as possible to wildlife, and at the beginning of my career, I thought doing so was a sign of success. With the evolution of my understanding on the craft and my personal approach to it, I no longer see it that way, but the fact remains that getting close to a wild animal produces a sense of voyeurism and satisfies scientific curiosity at the same time.

"Close" aims to capture an intimate image of each featured species and hopefully achieves some kind of connection between subject and viewer, to produce a sense of amazement in the face of the natural patterns and designs and (in some cases) even a slight touch of distant fear. There is, of course, a different relationship with the image if the viewer happens to also be a wildlife photographer, in which case technical aspects will certainly become more relevant. But the fact remains that, at the end of the day, there is a big part of us that just wants to get close to the fire, face to face with nature, and somehow peek into that life we are slowly leaving behind.























Mario Davalos



Mario Davalos, artist and entrepreneur, has been traveling the globe in search of transcendent nature and perhaps himself. Trained as an artist at Parsons School of Design in New York City, he has the eye of an abstract painter and an absolutely natural compositional sense.

Davalos spends weeks roaming everywhere from Alaska to Costa Rica hunting for the most intense splashes of color and dynamic contrasts that nature has to offer.

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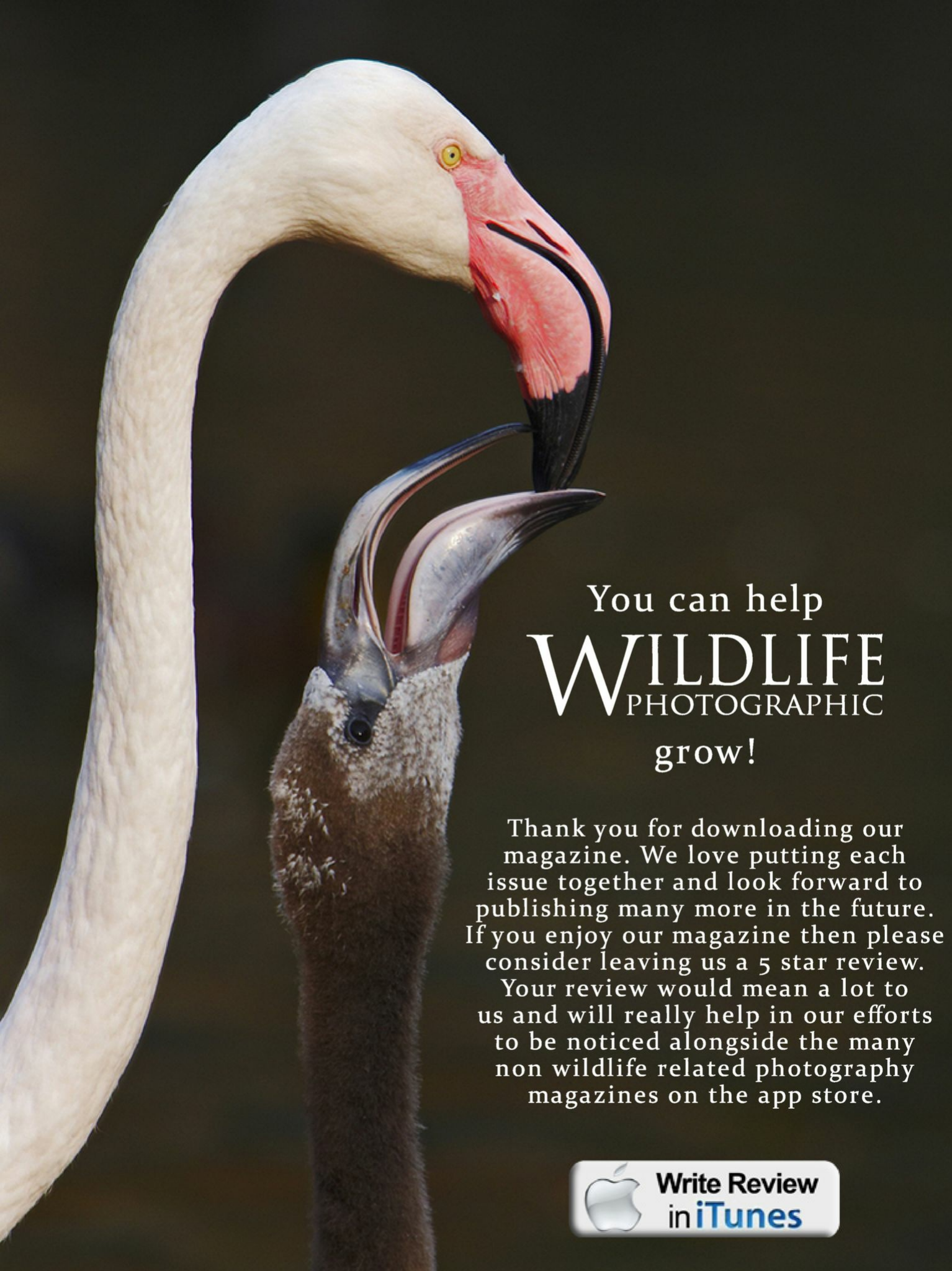
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Laguna del Lagarto Rainforest Lodge:

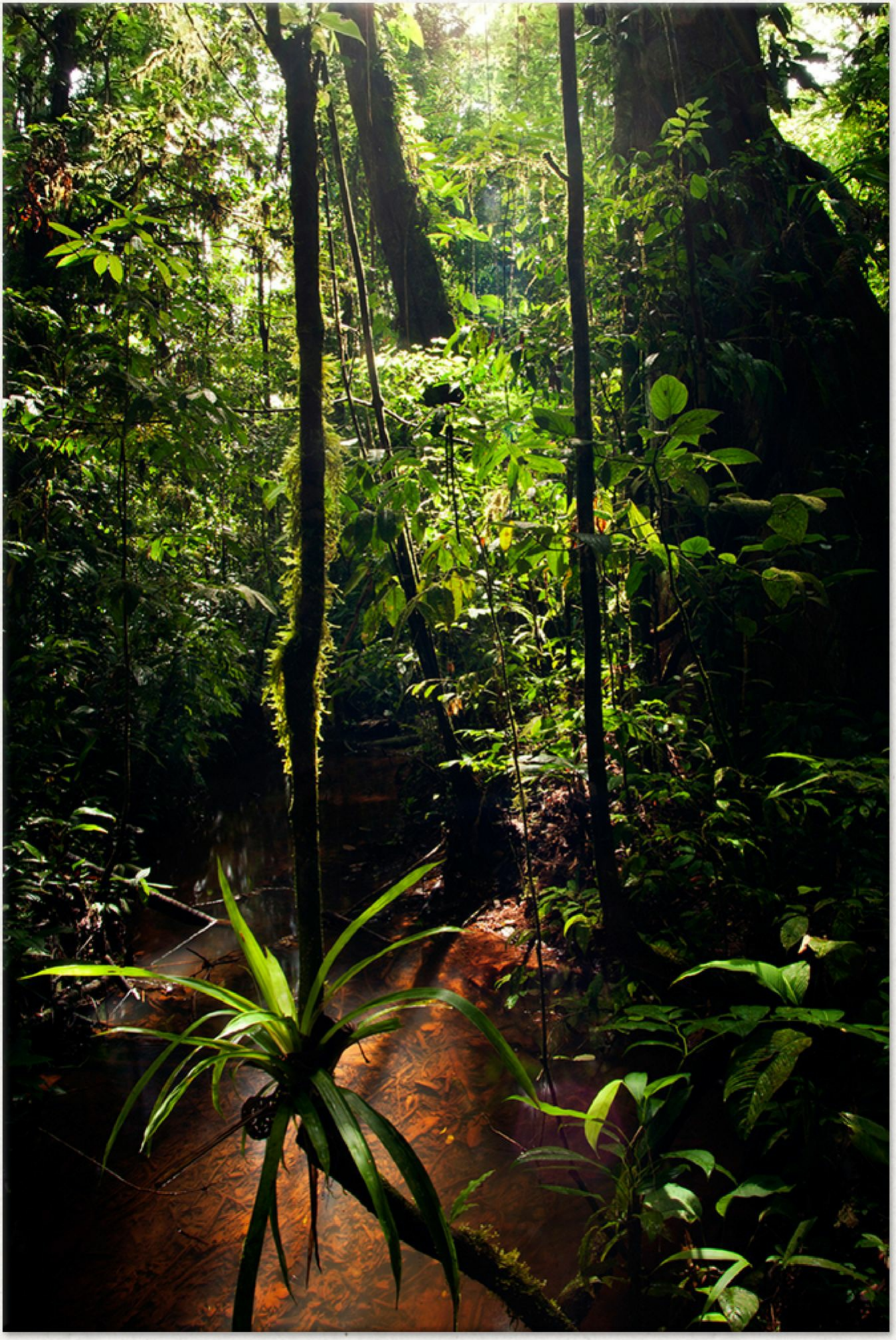
A favorite photographic hotspot in Costa Rica



By Bill Gozansky

The Laguna del Lagarto Rainforest Lodge is one of my favorite spots for bird and wildlife photography in northern Costa Rica. Nestled among 1,250 acres of tropical rainforest, this remote eco-lodge boasts an incredible diversity of flora and fauna. Since the lodge (which is located just outside the village of Boca Tapada) lies only 130 kilometers north of the Juan Santamaria Airport, you might think it shouldn't be too hard to get to. Unfortunately, you'd be wrong! Under "normal" conditions, the drive averages about five hours. Yes, five hours to travel 130 kilometers (80 miles)! I won't give away too many details about the journey since I don't want to spoil the adventure, but let's just say it is a drive you won't soon forget. Even though conditions can prove difficult at times (a 4x4 is recommended in parts), many sections of the road are quite scenic and you'll likely find some great photo opportunities along the way.

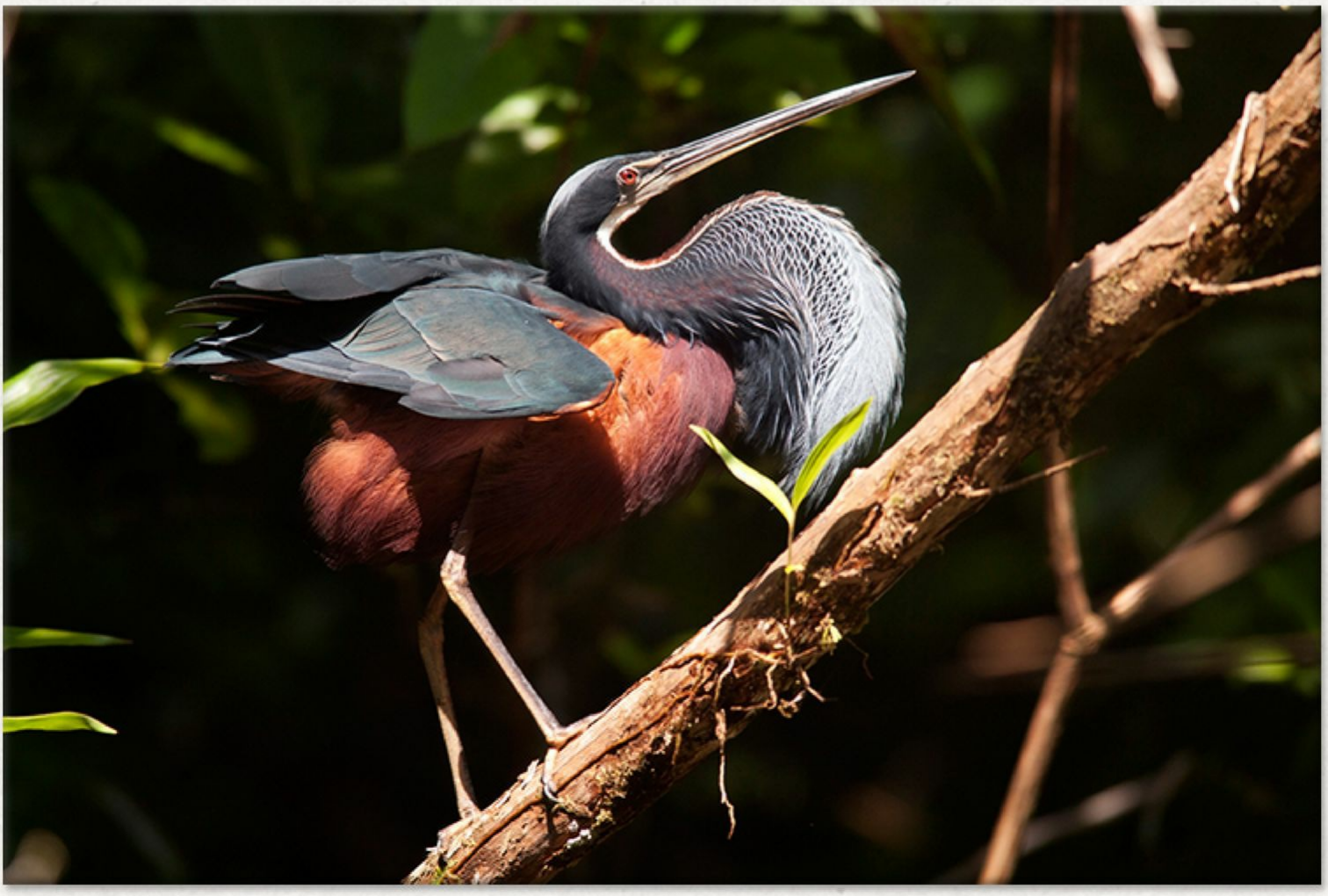




Once you've arrived, you can relax and enjoy the peaceful tranquility of the lodge and surrounding rainforest. However, I bet you won't be able to relax for too long before reaching for your camera. The Laguna del Lagarto Lodge has done an excellent job of designing viewing and photography platforms for guests. They have strategically planted tropical trees and shrubs, as well as placed many well-designed and natural-looking fruit feeding stations, that attract a wide variety of tropical bird species within a very close proximity to these observation areas. The lodge's viewing platforms essentially serve as hides (i.e. blinds), providing photographers a great opportunity to get up close and personal with many rainforest species that would be nearly impossible to photograph otherwise. It is fascinating to watch the behavior and interaction of these colorful tropical birds at such close range. Highlights include the keel-billed toucan, chestnut-manibled toucan, collared aracari, great curassow, and boisterous Montezuma oropendola. Don't forget a great variety of tanagers, honeycreepers, and hummingbirds. Again these are just highlights; over 350 species of birds have been identified in the area.

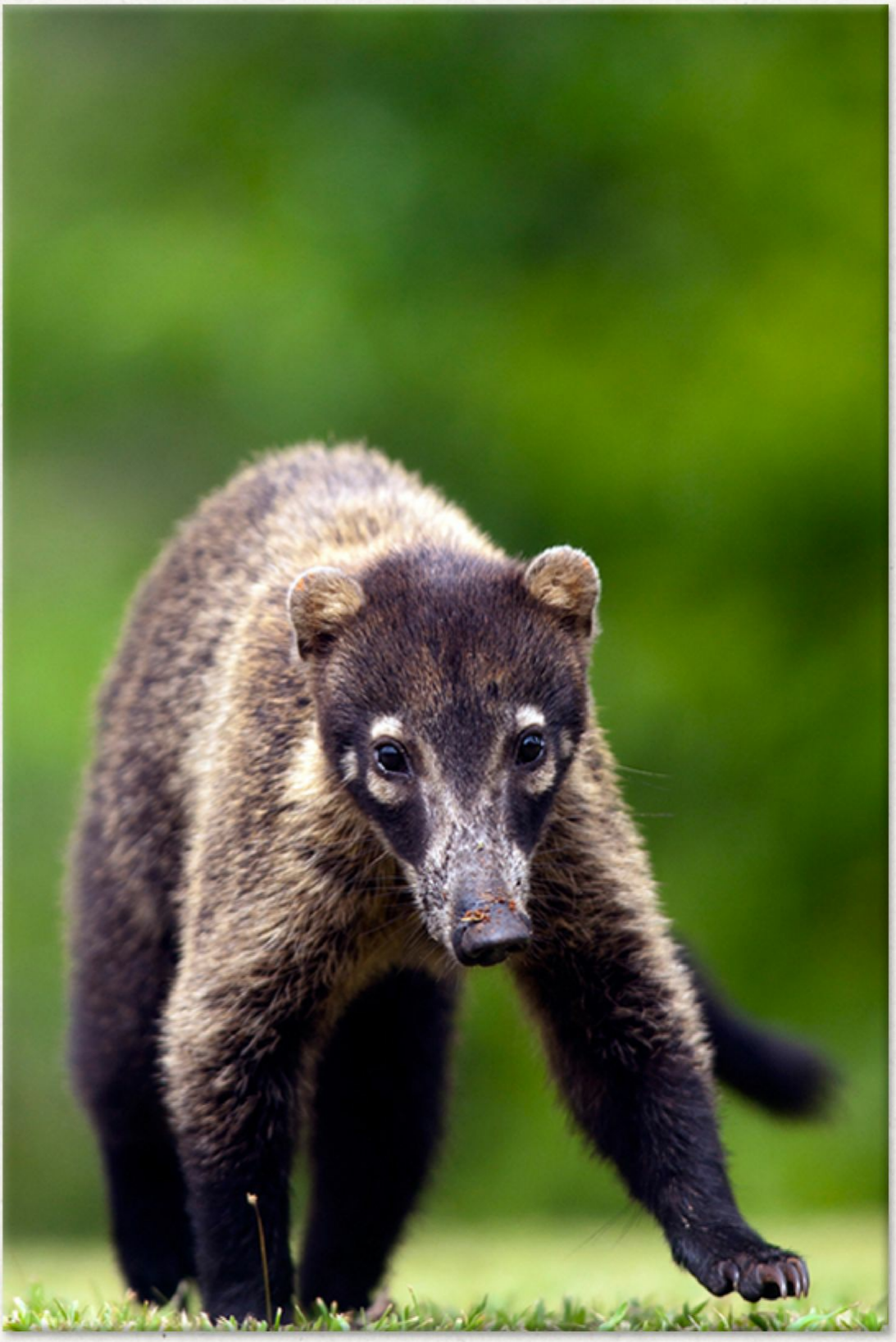


Surrounding the lodge are two main lagoons easily accessible by canoe. Here you'll have the opportunity to photograph such creatures as caiman, basilisk lizards, turtles, and, of course, a variety of birds that frequent this habitat, including several species of kingfishers, tiger-herons, and (depending on the time of year) even the reclusive Agami heron. The shy Agami heron can frequently be seen feeding in the dark, dense vegetation along the water’s edge. Often it proves difficult to get an unobstructed view of this unique heron due to its feeding behavior and preference for the lagoon's dark recesses. However, with patience and a little luck you might find an Agami heron catching a little sun out in the open. Note that this image did not come easily. I had several unsuccessful days of stalking this elusive bird in my canoe before I finally got a nice viewing angle and a bit of good fortune finding it in the sun.



Laguna del Lagarto also has over 10 kilometers of well-marked rainforest trails. I should warn you that, although the trails are well-marked, they often are quite muddy. But no worries! The lodge supplies rubber boots and sturdy walking sticks that will allow you to tackle the muddy terrain. Thanks to this private land's remoteness, you'll feel like you have the tropical rainforest all to yourself. The rainforest is home to an incredible diversity of wildlife. You can encounter spider monkeys, howler monkeys, white-nosed coati, and agouti. If you are really lucky, you might cross paths with tapir.

Numerous species of reptiles and amphibians abound, including a healthy population of colorful green-and-black and strawberry-poison-dart frogs that you are certain to encounter along the trails.





At nightfall, the rainforest comes alive. Snakes, frogs, insects, and other critters that have stayed hidden during the day become active at night, presenting a whole new array of macro photography opportunities. Additionally, nectar-feeding bats frequent the area. There is something quite memorable about standing in the pitch black rainforest surrounded by hundreds of little bats as you work on your camera settings and composition ideas. Standing in the darkness, you definitely have a heightened state of awareness (and imagination) as every sound—a snap of a twig, rustle of a leaf, or chirp of a cricket—can certainly get your adrenaline flowing. It is good fun for the adventurous!

Rainforest photography considerations

No doubt that the Costa Rican rainforest is a tough environment in which to photograph. Rainforest wildlife can be very secretive and skittish. Often, you'll only find it very high up in the canopy. Add to this difficult weather conditions (think rain, hence the name “rainforest”) and problematic light conditions (either low light or harsh, contrasty light), and you’ve got quite a challenge on your hands.

Gear Considerations: Lens choice is first and foremost a personal decision that depends on your shooting style, preferred subject matter, and artistic vision. Still, your subject matter often drives your lens needs. If bird photography is your thing, you are in the right place! A big lens is always a great asset, generally the bigger the better. However, at the Laguna del Lagarto Lodge a 400mm lens should suit most shooting situations since the viewing platforms allow for such close proximity to the birdlife. (I find that a tele-converter, which provides a little more reach in certain situations, can be a great asset as well.) Macro photography opportunities abound. From tiny (and not-so-tiny) insects to reptiles, amphibians, and plant life, the creative opportunities in the macro world are literally everywhere. In fact, I think you'll find that macro photography is often a great go-to alternative when the weather isn’t at its best or when the larger mammals are being reclusive. If available, I recommend a dedicated macro lens. However, a set of extension tubes could serve as a lightweight and effective alternative.

As mentioned previously, the Lagarto Lodge offers opportunities to photograph and explore the lagoons by canoe. Photographing from a canoe presents challenges in itself, what with the canoe’s movement, difficult lighting situations, and the general struggles one encounters when approaching wildlife from the water. Here a longer telephoto lens (400mm and beyond) will definitely come in handy, but stabilization will be an issue with wobbly watercraft, moving wildlife, and the invariably low light. Cameras with high ISO performance will definitely help in this situation.

Since you'll always find opportunities to capture environmental landscape and portrait images during your travels, wide-angle to mid-range lenses (say 17mm to 200mm) will also come in handy. Given all these factors, I’d suggest bringing the majority of your lens coverage to Costa Rica. During your stay, I think you’ll find opportunities to use almost every lens in your bag.









Don't Forget Your Flash: One of the challenges of photographing in a rainforest is the lack of available light. The canopy becomes so dense in places that little illumination reaches the forest floor. When photographing, you should have your flash available and ready to go at all times, even in the middle of the day. Situations will pop up where light filtering through the canopy creates some amazing effects, but your subject might not always be in these areas. Having your flash available can really make the difference in getting the shot.

The rainforest can have beautiful light at times, but keep in mind that these times of golden light never last as long as we'd like. Given the weather conditions expected in a tropical rainforest (namely rain), it might not occur at all. And even with great light, the flash may add a beautiful catch-light (i.e. glint) in your subject's eyes. I'd say that flash is often invaluable when it comes to bird photography. It can illuminate birds in the canopy or arrest the motion of birds in flight. One additional thing regarding flash: If you have a lens range of 400mm or more, a small device such as the Better Beamer or flash extender may come in handy. These relatively inexpensive add-ons allow your flash to have greater reach when working with larger focal length lenses.

Flash will also prove very important in your macro photography work. Ring flash, flash extension cords, or remote flash capability are all great tools. The more opportunities you have to get your flash off the camera, the more interesting results I think you will achieve. In addition to creative use of flash, alternative light sources such as flashlights, LED lights, and headlamps can also serve as very effective supplemental light sources. These tools can also be used for light painting techniques which can be great fun to experiment with in the rainforest.



Protect Your Gear from the Elements: Bring lightweight stuff bags or dry bags for your gear. In the rainforest of Costa Rica, I find these bags very handy when working around water (remember those unsteady canoes!) and tropical downpours. Generally, I try to buy bags big enough to accommodate my camera with a flash and my largest lens attached. You want to be able to quickly access or stow your gear. A more low-tech option is have plenty of plastic garbage bags on hand. Additionally, the moisture and extreme humidity of the rainforest can cause performance issues with your electronic equipment, so I always stuff extra desiccant packs (dry packs of silica gel) in my camera bags to help absorb any moisture around my gear.

The Costa Rican rainforest is definitely a challenging environment, but overcoming the hurdles of such a primitive and pristine eco-system can be quite rewarding. I think you will find that the Laguna del Lagarto Lodge has made some really great efforts to support and enhance the photographic experience for their guests. Any outdoor photographer will surely enjoy it. To learn more about the Laguna del Lagarto Lodge, please visit their website here







Bill Gozansky



Bill Gozansky is a travel, nature, and wildlife photographer based in south Florida. Bill's quest for images enables him to explore unique destinations and interact with diverse cultures across the globe. He currently leads photographic safaris to Namibia, Kenya, Costa Rica, and Ecuador. In a private or small group setting, Bill teaches field techniques of professional travel, nature, and wildlife photography in these remarkable natural areas. Bill's award-winning images have been exhibited in galleries, published in many periodicals and books, and sold as fine art prints to private collectors. Bill has recently created the Images for Conservation Fund Photo Guide Series: Nature & Travel Photography app that illustrates professional photographic techniques for nature and travel photography.

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INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION PHOTOGRAPHERS

Sometimes taking a beautiful photo is not enough. Images have the power to inspire and to drive change, so why not harness this power to advance conservation efforts all around the globe? This is the basic idea that brought nearly 40 photographers together in Anchorage, Alaska, in 2005 to form the International League of Conservation Photographers (iLCP). Ten years later, iLCP is recognized as one of the world's most dynamic and influential conservation organizations.

iLCP's main goal is to enlist the skills and expertise of some of the world's best nature and wildlife photographers to advance conservation efforts around the globe. As a project-driven organization, it partners with leading scientists, policy makers, government leaders, and conservation groups to produce high-quality documentary images of both the beauty and challenges facing the natural world. iLCP aims to replace environmental indifference with a new culture of stewardship and a passion for our beautiful planet.

iLCP's Fellowship currently includes 108 photographers from all over the world. For many, membership in iLCP is an aspirational goal. Yet achieving it is not easy. The application is rigorous, and the selection process is highly selective. iLCP aims for the highest standards in both photography and conservation work, so a Fellowship is only granted to those who have a proven commitment to conservation action, demonstrate superior photographic skills, and practice the highest ethical and professional standards in all of their work.



Since 2007, iLCP has launched 43 conservation photography expeditions worldwide. In each of these efforts, the organization joined forces with local or international NGO conservation partners to help them maximize the impact of their conservation messages. In many cases, iLCP expeditions have been at the root of major changes in policies and practices. The images produced during these intensive documentary efforts have inspired the creation of national parks, lead to laws being changed, and (most importantly) helped educate millions upon millions of people about the value of natural and cultural heritage.

In the last 12 months, iLCP has dispatched its Fellows to locations as varied as Australia, Canada, Mexico, Honduras, Palau, and Panama. During these expeditions, the photographers documented a wide array of topics such as the health of coral reefs, the impact of development plans on wild spaces and human settlements, and fisheries management, to name just a few. iLCP's most extensive expedition in 2014 was to the Mesoamerican reef (MAR). The MAR ecosystem lies within the Caribbean Sea and spans the coasts of the Central American countries of Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico.

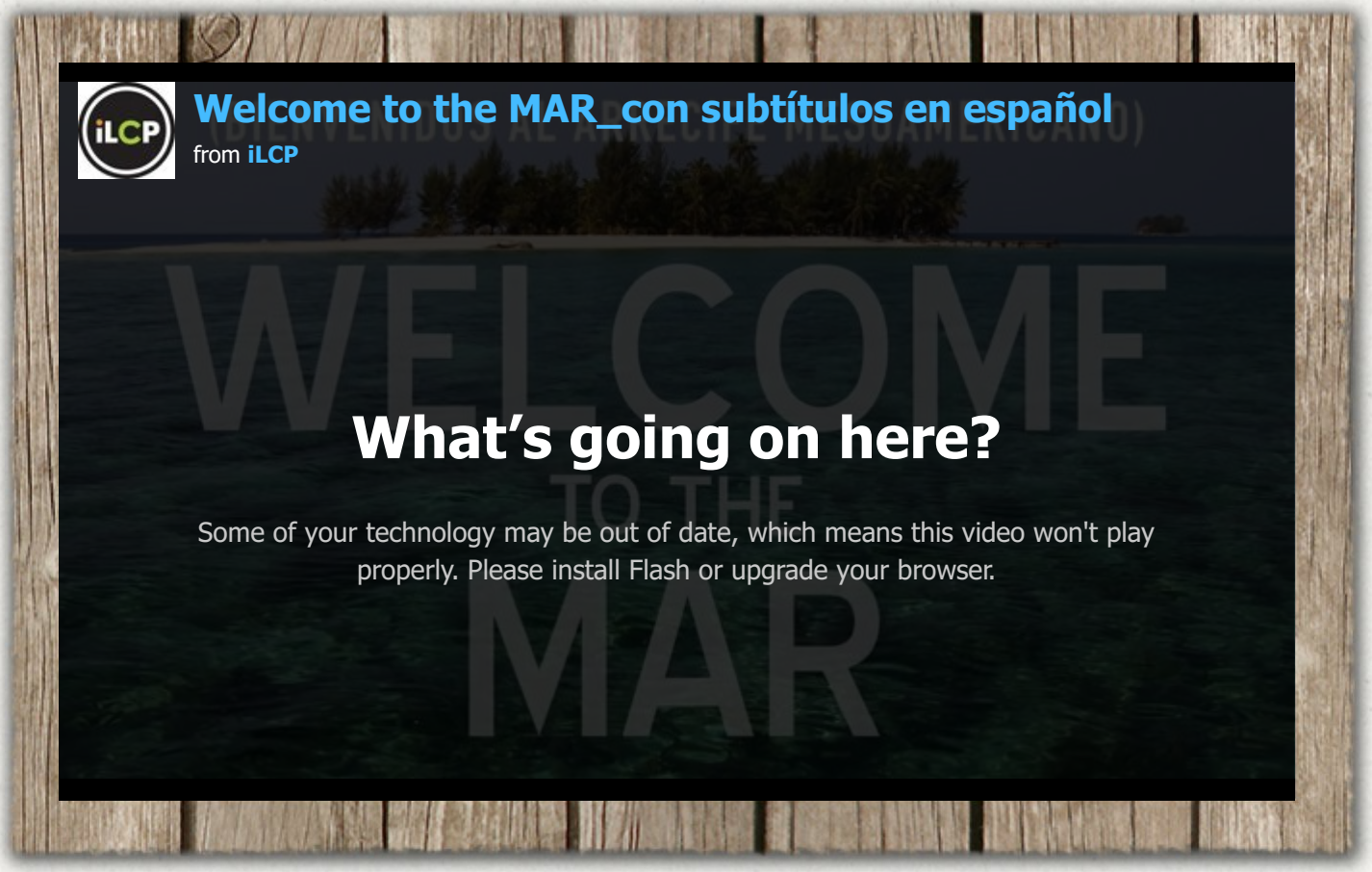




Notably, it is the second longest barrier reef in the world after Australia's Great Barrier Reef. The health of this reef system is vital not only because of its ecological and environmental significance, but also because it serves as a support system for hundreds of local fishing communities whose very livelihoods depend on it. Together with its conservation partners, iLCP is participating in an effort to have the four country governments set aside at least 20% of the reef eco-system as no-take fish refuges. This would allow fish populations to replenish and protect a number of endangered species.

Four iLCP photographers—Karen Kasmauski, Jason Houston, Keith Ellenbogen, and Claudio Contreras Koob—were dispatched to photograph underwater or in the coastal communities. Together they captured the MAR in all its fragile beauty and provided iLCP's local and international partners with an impressive and diverse body of visual assets. These photos now help raise awareness about the threats facing this important ecosystem and assist in securing additional protections for the reef.

iLCP also coordinated the creation of multiple video clips aimed at the various audiences who interact with the MAR. The images and video are being used to educate local fishing communities and their political leadership on the importance of incorporating sustainable practices into their everyday lives, as well as to educate visitors on sustainable tourism practices.






Keith Ellenbogen/ iLCP



iLCP's conservation partners in Mexico and Honduras are achieving concrete results with advocacy campaigns that actively use these visual materials. Most recently, five large U.S.-based seafood companies notified the government of Honduras that they will no longer be buying spiny lobster caught through unsustainable practices that cause harm to divers and the lobster population. The companies expressed interest in helping transition this US$40 million a year industry to safer and more environmentally friendly fishing techniques that discourage overfishing and help the spiny lobster population recover in numbers.

The MAR expedition is an excellent example of how iLCP gets involved at all levels of a conservation communications campaign and supports its project partners during each stage of collateral production. In creating the imagery, it not only strives for photographic excellence, but also aims to create effective tools that will help conservation organizations achieve positive and concrete outcomes.

When the effort of every individual counts, iLCP Fellow Photographers are making a tremendous difference for our planet, both individually and as a collective. Photography really can change the world, and iLCP is at the forefront a movement to do just that.




Karen Kasmauski/ iLCP


Karen Kasmauski/ iLCP


Karen Kasmauski/
iLCP


Claudio Contreras Koob/
iLCP


Keith Ellenbogen/ iLCP


Claudio Contreras Koob/ iLCP


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INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE OF
CONSERVATION
PHOTOGRAPHERS
FIND OUT MORE ...
WEBSITE
DONATE
FACEBOOK
NAT GEO
VOICES
Jason Houston/
iLCP



ENJOYING WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY

By Ivan Cordero



Are you just starting out in wildlife photography or thinking about it? Do you believe it's only the elite professionals that can have all the fun with their high-tech $12,000 cameras and big lenses? Let me start by saying that wildlife photography is well within your grasp. Just bear with me, read on, and see how you too can enjoy wildlife photography. There are three basic requirements for wildlife photography.

First, you need to want to do it. It's a burning desire to grab the camera as soon as you wake up or it's the "darn-it" thought: "I wish I had brought my camera along!" It's waiting for Saturday morning to go out on the hiking trail and hoping all the while that it won't rain. You're always analyzing "how this could have been a great shot" or thinking "there's that darn hawk I've been after all summer and I left my camera at home."

Second, you need to have a device that captures images. You certainly don't need a $2,000 camera (unless you have the money for it). In reality, to capture a moment you could even do with an old cellular that still has a functional camera on it. Just take a look at Instagram. Capturing incredible wildlife images is not all about hardware (although it helps); it's about timing and seeing the moment no one else has time to see, all through your camera lens.

Third, you need to have the capability to patiently point and shoot. OK, I bet all the "real" photographers out there must be cringing. Well, early on I learned there is something called autofocus on most point-and-shoot cameras. Use it, at least while you're starting out. Remember, it's about having a good time taking pictures. As a beginner, that bird or butterfly is not going to wait for you to analyze every shot. Dirty little secret: Get a big memory card and take the same picture many times. There is nothing worse than finding out afterwards that the image was blurred. Later in your photography journey you will take fewer and better pictures as you acquire additional skills and experience.

That's it! Now go out there and start taking beautiful wildlife pictures. Believe me, there is really no major life-changing requirements to enjoy photography. Actually, the most difficult part of photography for me is finding the time



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to hit the trail. Wildlife photography is all about capturing an image of what you see in the wild. Most of the time a wildlife scene can't be staged. It's just that—wildlife, unpredictable and uncontrolled. And since you can't control wildlife subjects, you should focus on learning about them as much as you can. That being said, most of the time the best pictures are captured out of pure luck, being at the right place/right time, and being curious enough to wonder "what if I snap it at this angle." That's 90% of what makes an extraordinary photograph; the other 10% is technical stuff you can learn later.

I recall an article I read recently where a photographer (Borut Furlan) captured the instant a female cardinal fish transferred her eggs to the male's mouth, and the image won a first-place prize in the Ocean Art Underwater Photo Contest. This event occurred in less than two seconds in a semi-dark cave of the Adriatic Sea and was not known until he reviewed the photo on the camera's screen. That's 90% luck and 10% underwater technique. And by no means am I undervaluing Mr. Furlan's amazing achievement; he did deserve the award for being at the right place at the right time.

To please those "real" photographers that might feel offended with my comments and to not underestimate all their years of experience, I will say the following. Maybe I have oversimplified, but these three requirements are a darn good start and that's all you need to get out there and enjoy photography. Believe me, once you get the photography bug, there is no going back, and what is lacking will find its way into your images as part of the learning process

Reader Contribution

Ivan Cordero is a Puerto Rican weekend photographer who enjoys long walks through Puerto Rico's mountain ranges and lush tropical forests. He's made photography a family event and cherishes every moment spent with his kids photographing wildlife, landscapes, and Puerto Rico's seashores. Ivan designed and administrates the WildAtPalmas.com nature photography website where he promotes local nature conservation. He acknowledges that wildlife photogra phy is not all about technically perfect images, but about creating a relationship with nature that he and his family can enjoy day to day



and your “in the field” experience. There is just so much to like about wildlife photography. Let’s not forget that the fun of wildlife photography is being out there, capturing the moment, and returning home with a lasting glimpse of it.

The benefits of wildlife photography are many and include some of the following. With a photo you can capture a moment and have it forever. Everything around you looks different when you start to see the world as a photographer. You lose yourself in shooting, and all your worries and daily stresses just melt away. Photography also lets you express yourself. For me, photography is an escape from the high-tension work week. There’s nothing like walking into the woodland, camera in hand, and not knowing what awaits you past the next tree line. Bottom line is photography can change your life in a very positive way. As you can see, it does not take much to enjoy wildlife photography. Anyone can enjoy photography. All it takes is those three simple requirements described above. It doesn’t matter if you’re young or old, what country you live in, or what language you speak. There is no other stronger means of expression than a picture. Just get your hands on a camera and start taking pictures of the world around you.

Well, I hope I have you all hyped and ready to go! Now where can you capture wildlife? You can start off by making a list of nature reserves and other locations where wildlife can be found. You’ll be amazed of what you see with a little patience and perseverance in your own backyard.





Photography (what you capture and how you go about it) is very personal, and it's all about what makes you happy. It's about seeing the beauty all around us even when others can't. It's something you can do at any time. It's all about the way you see your world and how you compose your photography. Through practise, you will decide what goes in your photography. You can follow golden photography rules such as ...

- Not all images will benefit from having the subject dead center; actually having the subject off center (primarily small subjects) can enhance the image composition. Google "rule of thirds" for additional information.
- Eyes tell 80% of the story. Make sure your subject's eyes are the main focus point of your-photography.
- Concentrate on more than your subject; check out the background, too. Does it add or subtract from the image? Will blurring the background highlight the subject?
  Always ask yourself if you're leading the viewer toward your subject. Think of the background as path leading toward the subject. Is that path clear and easy to follow?

Or just make up your own set of rules. That is the beauty of photography, it's all about how you interpret the world around you. Photography is personal, it's what you make of it, and what you are willing to share with the rest of us.

The camera is only one part of the wildlife equation. You also need to get to know your subjects. It was out in the field that I learned how the dragonfly usually perches on a twig and that if I keep the shutter pressed (in continuous drive mode) as it flies off, I will have a good chance of capturing some in-flight images as it returns to perch on the same twig. Really get to know what wildlife you are likely to see in your environment, and read as much as you can about it. Learn how the seasons change your environment. Are your subjects more active in the morning or are they up and around during the evening? Will you need a blind to get close to your subjects? Learn all you can, practise, think about the fun you're having, and open yourself up to your own experiences. Keep at it, and you'll see firsthand why being a photographer is so much fun. On a final note: Keep your wildlife adventure within safe boundaries, do your utmost to leave the wildlife habitat intact, and avoid stressing your wildlife subjects.





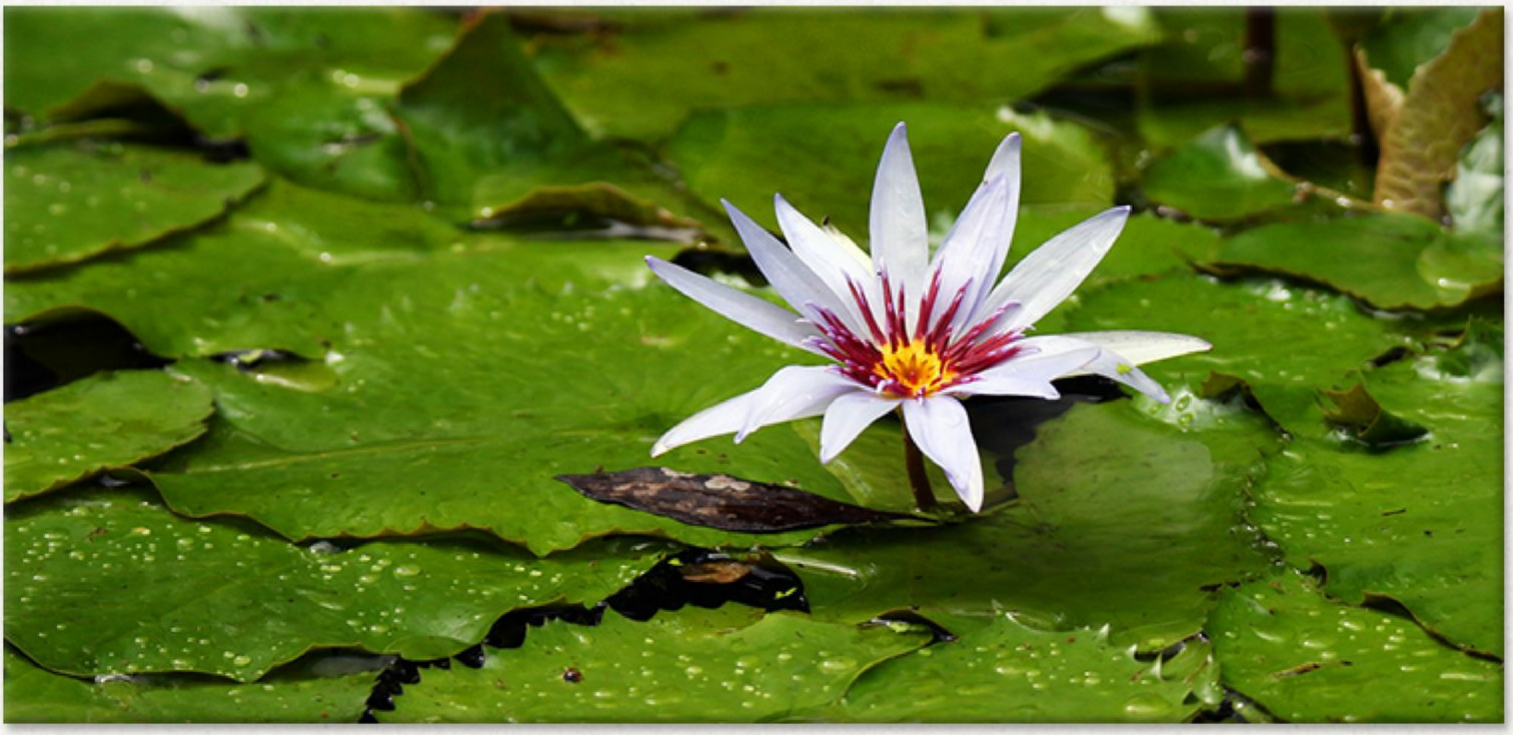
It's up to you on how and when you progress from one level to another; the key is to enjoy each level doing something that challenges you to better yourself. As you progress, you will be motivated to ask yourself questions like, "Why are some of my images blurry? Why hadn't I noticed before that some of my images with horizons are slanted? How can I capture that bird in flight? How and why does natural light affect my images?" The good news is that, as you ask these questions, you will start filling in the gaps with the knowledge to achieve the images that you want and expect. Focus on the basics first. Read the camera manual. Really get to know your camera. If there is one thing to get better at, concentrate on achieving sharp images. But don't just read about it. Get out into the field and make photography. It's only when you are out there in the swamp or forest that you really start acquiring your own set of skills. Wildlife photography is all about doing. Want sharp images? Use a tripod; yes you will need to carry it into the field, but its worth every darn pound it weighs. Want good lighting? Early morning and sunset is what the professionals say. Want to just take pictures? Any time is what I say; just make the environment work for you. Too much light with sharp shadows? Use a flash. Too little light? Learn to use the ISO setting.

During the learning process, take the time to learn all about shutter speed, aperture, and ISO. Learning about these functions will move you out of the automatic camera mode and in to the next level, manual mode. Learning about these functions will help you enjoy the feeling of accomplishment by photographing based on your own analysis and not letting the camera decide for you. Don't feel overwhelmed as you progress. Photography is a journey; the pictures are what you take along this path to remind you there is still a lot left to travel.

Wildlife photography, like most things in life, just needs a starting point. Remember the requirements—want it, get a camera, and point and shoot. Photography is not only for the fortunate few, and it can bring great joy and a feeling of accomplishment to your life. Wildlife photography gets you out of your house or apartment by inviting you into an amazing world unique to your own experience.

> *"You don't make a photograph just with a camera. You bring to the act of photography all the pictures you have seen, the books you have read, the music you have heard, the people you have loved." – Ansel Adams*

In other words, it's what you bring into the picture that really counts and what will set your wildlife photography apart from the rest.



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