

# *Helpful Hints to Capture Great Images of Birds*

*By Robert Campbell*

I highly recommend checking and rechecking camera settings before setting out on any photographic outing. Don't forget the cameras mode -- program, manual or aperture preferred --, ASA, F stop, shutter speed etc. Check the batteries and take along a spare set.

It is a good idea to go areas where there is lots of opportunity to photograph birds. While a feeder in ones own back yard is often overlooked, pick nick areas, parks and zoos are a few possible locations Find out the areas where the birds you seek frequent. Feeding birdseed, water or even suet can attract some birds. Federal or State Wildlife sanctuaries such as Bosque Del Apache offer lots of photography. Contact your local Audubon society for information in locating the birds you wish to photograph.

Starting from an SLR camera with a normal 50 mm lens which could be adequate in a few extremely limited photographic set up situations and progressing to professional SLR cameras with fast motor drives 3 ½ frames a second or faster and fast long telephoto lenses in the 200mm to 800 mm range makes the task easier. Whatever camera equipment you have is likely to work well in some situations.

I prefer to have my shutter speed above 125 th of a second and an F stop near F 8. Shoot a test and determine the right exposure for your camera and the image you are attempting to capture.

In order to put a glint of light in a birds eye I use a small flash or position the camera as to catch a glint of sunlight, otherwise the subject may appear lifeless. Today the photographer can simulate that necessary glint using a computer but why do extra work.

I like to watch a birds habits, where the bird lights, a particular branch, twig, etc You can focus on that area and be ready for the bird. Watch where a bird flies like at a sea shore, across a particular area of land or up or down a stream. How close is the bird to one shoreline or the other? How a bird approaches a feeder flying from a tree or up from the ground. Which direction do they fly to get to their feeding ground? Prefocusing on the area where the bird will be keeps the lens focus close to the area of focus where the bird's eye will be sharp. You will not have to move the focusing ring much to manually bring the bird's eye into focus. I find auto focus a burden to overcome photographing flying birds opting to go to manual focus for most situations.

I believe the best blinds to photograph from are a window or a vehicle. Avoid tall scaffolding even when guy wired as they can fall in high winds and avoid using parachutes as they get extremely hot and cut off air. I find net camo is the very best material for a blind.

Unless totally unavoidable do not approach birds head on. These photos seldom work out for lack of depth of field. Instead walk in an ever-tighter circle getting closer and closer photographing as you go stopping still only for the time it takes to press the shutter button.

Noise will either scare the bird away or mesmerize it to staying where it is. It's anyone's guess.

A recorded call or the particular bird one seeks can help you find your subject. I recommend this when going out for screech owls or elf owls around the end of April.

High-speed flash can freeze hummingbirds but I prefer slight movement of the wing tips.

Go for the eyes, get the eye in focus.

Binoculars can help in locating birds. Use a mirror to reflect sunlight on the ground which may cause the bird to move to a better location.

Do not forget to have fun!