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BEGINNER

# Tips for Photographing Birds

Featuring **DIANE BERKENFELD, TOM BOL, MIKE CORRADO, JACK DYKINGA, CAROL FREEMAN, ED MASTERSON, MICHAEL MILLER, NIKON AMBASSADOR MOOSE PETERSON & DIANA ROBINSON**



© Michael Miller

Patience, especially when photographing such a colorful bird as a Peacock is a necessity, to capture an image such as this. D700, AF-S NIKKOR 24-70mm f/2.8G ED, 1/1000 second, f/2.8, ISO 200, aperture priority, Center weighted metering.

Lots of folks enjoy watching and taking pictures of birds. One of the great things about these animals is that you can usually find birds to photograph most anywhere—in your backyard (stopping for a bite to eat at a bird feeder, or resting on a tree branch), at a wildlife sanctuary, zoo or aviary, or even when travelling. Many birds are made up of beautiful colors and their plumage makes them ideal subjects. Also, don't forget about the larger birds that can't fly—like the ostrich, emu, penguin and domestic turkey (wild turkeys and chickens can fly!). Read on for a few tips to help you photograph them more successfully...

Birds are like most small animals that don't like to be approached, so you'll want to use the longest telephoto or zoom lens that you own. If you have to tell the viewer where (or what) the subject is, you're probably too far away. For those of you using one of Nikon's D-SLR's with a DX-format image sensor, with its cropped view, can make that telephoto give you a tighter image.

When approaching birds, think about what they're familiar with. If you're walking on a trail, they'll almost certainly fly away as soon as you get close. At an outdoor sanctuary, they're more likely to be accustomed to cars driving through. They may remain if you stop the car, so in that case, try shooting from the car, using the window frame as a brace to steady the camera (lower the window first). Be sure to turn off the car's engine, or the vibration may cause blur in the photo.

Sometimes though, certain birds will become so used to the presence of humans, that they will let you come closer than normal. Pigeons in big cities, sea gulls at the coast, and ducks, geese and swans on bodies of water often venture closer if you're patient. Even with birds such as these, keep your distance from mommy birds with her chicks, because she will act protective if she feels their babies are in harm's way.



© Diana Robinson

This portrait of a Grey Crowned Crane shows that you don't always need to include the subject's entire body in a photograph. Just like a portrait of a person, you can compose a headshot, medium crop or full-length. D3S, AF-S NIKKOR 600mm f/4G ED VR, 1/6400 second, f/4, ISO 800, aperture priority, Matrix metering.

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Don't forget to watch for action. Watch for the bird to take flight, and try to catch it the moment the bird takes off. Freezing a bird in flight can be magical.

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As with most living subjects, observe what the birds are doing, and think about

how you can best take a picture of them. Try to take a profile (showing one of the bird's eyes, or full view of its face, with both eyes visible. If you can't see the eyes, the image will have less impact.

Taking photographs from a high vantage point, if possible, will have the viewer see your images from a bird's eye view (pun intended); as opposed to shooting upwards from the ground. Your photos will also have a more unique looking background this way.

A similar concept works when photographing birds floating on water. By using a low viewpoint, your images are more natural looking than if you were to just point the camera down at a bird as it floats by.

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© Jack Dykinga

This image of a Sandhill Crane is a great example of a silhouette. D3S, AF-S NIKKOR 600mm f/4G ED VR, 1/1000 sec, f/7.1, ISO 1600, aperture priority, Matrix metering.

You'll want to think about your camera settings for bird photography. Because you'll probably be using a long lens, try to keep the shutter speed fairly high, around 1/500 of a second or higher, if you're hand-holding the camera. A lower shutter speed may cause blur. Remember that you can raise your ISO to help attain faster shutter speeds. Also, depending upon the background behind the bird, you may want to use a wide-open aperture, like f/4 or f/2.8 which will blur the background, making it less distracting than if it were sharp.

Depending upon whether you're walking through a park, or in your car, stopped (safely) off the road, you may want to use your car door or roof to steady the camera. If you're on foot, a tripod or monopod can do the trick. Serious bird photographers will use a hunter's blind, which is basically a (pop-up) portable



enclosure that hides you from the birds' view, while allowing you to take pictures in the field.

If you're taking pictures of birds in flight (taking off, flying, landing), set your autofocus to Continuous. And make sure your frame rate is set to Continuous, too, so you can hold down the shutter button to shoot a quick series of images.

The way to a bird's heart (like any other animal or human) is through his stomach. By placing a birdfeeder or birdhouse in your yard, filled with birdseed, you can bring the winged creatures straight to you and your camera. Pre-focusing on the perch allows you to set the camera and wait for the birds to land. Remember when placing your birdfeeder to look for an area that is lit well, and will provide you with a nice looking background for your photos.

And don't forget the value of patience. Sometimes it's just a matter of waiting for that perfect picture.



© Carol Freeman

Photograph birds in their natural surroundings. Here the photographer photographed the hummingbird as it drank nectar from a flower. D810, AF Micro-Nikkor 200mm f/4D IF-ED, 1/1600 second, f/8, ISO 640, aperture priority, Matrix metering.

To see more of Tom Bol's photographs, check out his website at [www.tombolphoto.com](http://www.tombolphoto.com).

To view more of Jack Dykinga's photos, visit his website at [www.dykinga.com](http://www.dykinga.com).

To see more of Ed Masterson's images, go to his website at [www.edmastersonphotography.com](http://www.edmastersonphotography.com).

To view more of Michael Miller's images, go to his website at [www.msmpix.com](http://www.msmpix.com).

To view more of Moose Peterson's images visit his website at [www.moosepeterson.com/blog](http://www.moosepeterson.com/blog).

To see more of Diana Robinson's photos, go to her website at [www.dianarobinsonphotos.com](http://www.dianarobinsonphotos.com).

To see more of Carol Freeman's photos, go to her website at [www.carolfreemanphotography.com](http://www.carolfreemanphotography.com).

*Featuring*

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