

BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY

BASICS

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Why bird photography?

Most people appreciate bird photos

Birds images do well in competition

Birds provide color, texture, form

Subjects are easy to find

Capturing good images is a challenge

Six key elements

Light quality

Light direction

Angle of inclination

Image simplification

Image sharpness

Head angle

Light quality

Shoot in the best possible light

Two hours after sunrise (my favorite)

Two hours before sunset

Bright overcast days

Avoid bright mid-day sun

Avoid dark, cloudy days



Bright Light

A Great Egret is perched on a nest constructed from a tangle of dry sticks and twigs. The nest is situated within a dense thicket of green bushes that are heavily laden with clusters of small, bright red berries. The bird's plumage is a mix of grey and white, with a distinctive black cap and a long, sharp yellow beak. The lighting is soft and diffused, creating a calm and natural atmosphere. The text "Soft light" is overlaid in the bottom left corner in a white, sans-serif font.

Soft light

Light direction

Point your shadow at your subject

Reduces shadows on your subject

Ensures a catchlight in subject's eye

Provides best color

Side lighting may work when sun is low



Poor light angle



Good light angle



Effective side lighting

Angle of inclination

Strive for a natural-looking pose

Position lens close to subject's eye level

Telephoto lenses are a big help

Be prepared to get low

Boardwalks can present a problem



Camera too high



Camera too low



Camera just right

Image simplification

Avoid drawing attention from subject

Position camera to eliminate distractions

Avoid highlights in background

Blur background elements

- Use a large aperture

- Seek subject-background separation

- Get low



700mm @ f/25



700mm @ f/5.6



Low perspective

A black-headed gull stands on a sandy dune, facing right. The bird has a black head and neck, a white body, and grey wings. Its beak is orange-red. The background is a clear blue sky with some green vegetation visible on the right. The text "Lower perspective" is overlaid in the bottom left corner.

Lower perspective

Image sharpness

Best images evoke emotion

Sharp detail provides the “wow” factor

Sharp focus on the eye is critical

“If it isn’t sharp.....”



Soft image



Sharp image

Sharpness in the field

- Use a tripod whenever possible
- Use the best lens you can afford
- Brace/anchor your telephoto
- Maintain fast shutter speed
- Avoid boardwalk vibration
- Take lots of photos

Sharpness in post-processing

Cull soft images mercilessly

Know your software sharpening tool

Sharpen as the last step in workflow

Sharpen for your output media

Head angle

“The eye is the window to the soul”
Want viewer to connect with subject
Strive for slight turn toward the lens
Owls are an exception



Poor head angle



Good head angle

Six key elements

Light quality

Light direction

Angle of inclination

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Image sharpness

Head angle



















Photographing birds in flight

Want both sun and wind at your back

Tripod or hand-held

Fast shutter speed is critical

Use correct IS setting

Use AI Servo auto-focus mode

Practice, practice, practice













Additional information

www.birdphotographers.net

The Art of Bird Photography II - CD (\$40)

Arthur Morris: www.birdsasart.com

Jim Neiger:

www.flightschoolphotography.com

Alan Murphy:

www.alanmurphyphotography.com