Bird photography basics

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When it comes to wildlife photography, birds are technically among the most accessible of subjects – after all, they are usually right on your doorstep (or garden, street, local park), and that gives you a great start. Here's what to do next…

Get up to speed

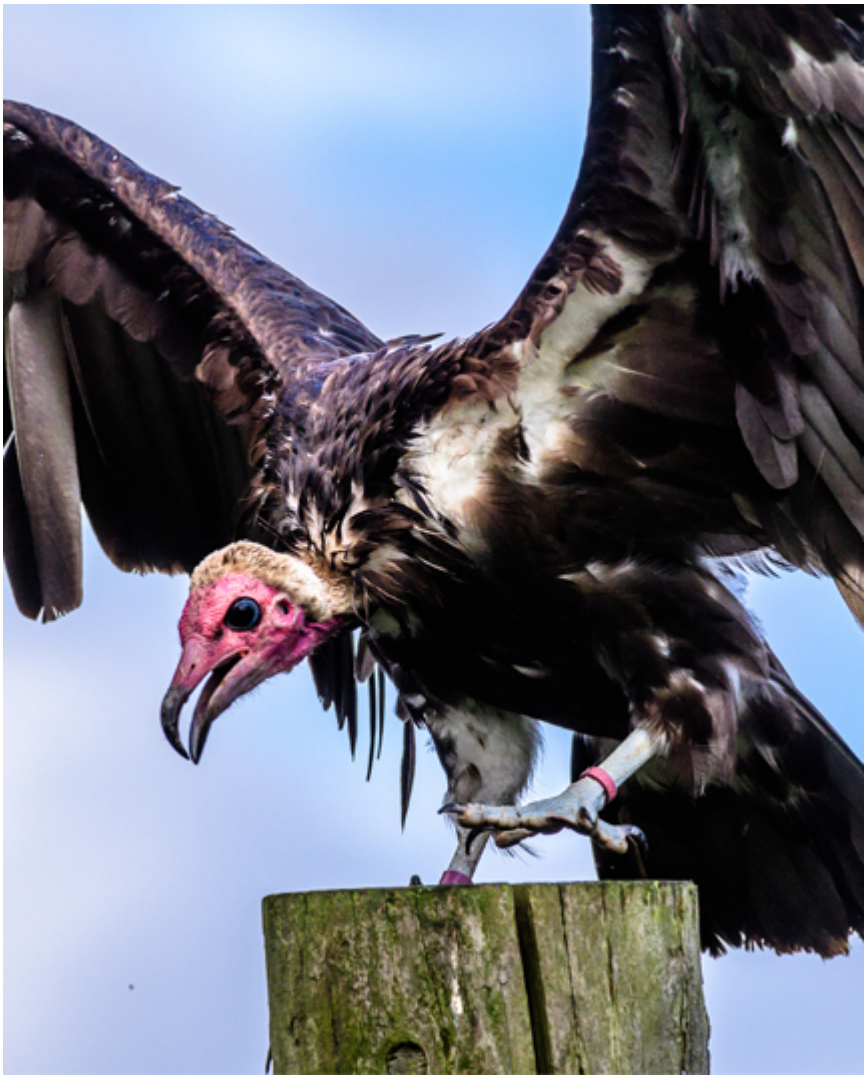


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The more you know about birds, or a particular species, the better – how well they tolerate human company; their feeding, courting and chick-rearing habits; their typical movements, and so on.

The greatest beneficiary of your knowledge will be the welfare of the birds themselves, which is the overriding factor in all wildlife photography.

Get closer



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In some situations birds are so used to the presence of humans that they'll let you come far closer than normal; urban pigeons, seagulls at the coast, and waterfowl living around popular lakes and rivers are often relatively comfortable around people. However, in general birds don't usually like to be approached, which means you'll want to use the longest telephoto lens you own.

• A 70-300mm zoom is very versatile, giving you the option of capturing "friendlier" birds with background detail at the wider 70mm end, but with the scope to photograph them from a distance with the 300mm end.

• The new 500mm f/5.6E PF ED VR has super-fast AF and pin-sharp focusing that is ideal for photographing birds, particularly behavioural shots, and as it's Nikon's smallest, lightest full-

frame 500mm prime yet, it's ideal if you're hiking or walking any distance to find your subjects.

• The super-telephoto 600mm f/4 is probably the ultimate for bird photography in the field; paired with the TC-17E teleconverter it enables a staggering 1020mm reach. With an angle of view of only two degrees, that combination gives you a huge amount of control over the background: simply moving a couple of centimetres to the left or right, up or down, totally changes it.

Check out more Nikon lenses that we recommend for wildlife, including birds, here.

Get flash

A big part of bird photography is flash, but not for the reason you might think. Using an SB-900 has more to do with colour than with exposure, simply because birds' feathers reflect colour, but the light we often find them in doesn't bring that colour out. Flash will. The flash technology built into Nikon Speedlights makes using an SB-900, SB-800 or SB-600 practically intuitive.

Get pin-sharp results



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When you're using telephoto lenses at the long end, using a tripod and a remote release to fire the shutter will minimise camera shake – which is ideal if you're happy to focus on one particular area, such as a feeding table or perch. However, go for a lens with VR (Vibration Reduction) and you'll be able to handhold with confidence at slower shutter speeds and

longer focal lengths than otherwise possible, which gives you a lot more freedom over what you can capture.

Quick tips

• Remember that with any Nikon DX camera, a non-DX lens will behave as if it were 1.5x longer, due to the DX sensor's crop factor.

• Give yourself more reach for less outlay with a teleconverter – it's basically a magnifying lens placed between your camera body and lens, to create a telephoto effect.

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