

Top Tips for eye-catching Bird Images

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One of the great things about photographing birds is that you can find them anywhere – in your garden, local parks and countryside, at a wildlife sanctuary, on holiday... Many sport beautiful colours, and they offer so many opportunities: feeding, flying, perching... Try out these tips to make the most of them.



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- First things first: do everything you can to minimise your chances of disturbing your subjects – neutral clothing, camouflage over your kit, no sudden movements, mobile phone set to silent. If you're serious, invest in a hunter's blind – a pop-up, portable, camouflaged

enclosure. Of course, some will be more used to the presence of people than others, like town seagulls and pigeons, ducks and swans that are used to being fed on popular lakes and rivers, and birds in zoos.

- A long lens is key, whether a zoom or a telephoto, enabling you to focus up close on your subjects without scaring them. Something around the 70-300mm or 80-400mm mark is a good all-rounder, whether you're out and about or shooting birds at your garden feeder, and you can always add a teleconverter to increase the reach of your lenses. A lens with built-in Vibration Reduction (VR) will allow you to handhold at up to four stops slower, which makes all the difference when light levels are low.
- To find birds, just follow the food – on the shoreline where they feed on crabs and fish, in woods where they feast on insects, or at a feeder in your own garden. Let your eyes do the walking – Nikon binoculars are indispensable for scanning a scene to look for the natural places where birds feed. Maximise your chances by considering timing and weather: early mornings and bright sunny days are best for a good bird turnout.
- Observe what they are doing, and think about how you can best take a picture of them. The more you know about their habits, the better, so read up on your subjects and get to know them. Try to take a profile showing one of the bird's eyes, or a full view of its face with both eyes visible. If you can't see the eyes, the image will have less impact. In your garden, use a birdfeeder or birdhouse filled with birdseed to bring the birds 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 decent background.
- Taking photographs from a high vantage point will have the viewer see your images from a bird's eye view (!), and your photos will also have a more unique-looking background. A similar concept works when photographing birds 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.
- Keep the shutter speed fairly high, around 1/500sec using a tripod or monopod, or higher if you're hand-holding, as a lower shutter speed may otherwise cause blur. Of course, you can raise your ISO to help attain faster shutter speeds. For perching or feeding birds, select

aperture priority and a wide-open aperture, like f/4 or f/2.8, to blur the background and concentrate attention on the bird.

- Watch for action: try to catch a bird the moment it takes off, or freeze it in flight with a fast shutter speed. For flight shots, set autofocus to Continuous, and set your frame rate to Continuous, too, so you can hold down the shutter button to shoot a quick series of images. Shutter-priority mode is useful; if you want more control, use manual mode and auto ISO.

Training

Do you love photographing wildlife and want to learn more? Check out the latest wildlife photography courses from Nikon School [here](#).