

Top tips for photographing Winter Wildlife

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- Winter can be a good time for wildlife photography, as many creatures have to venture more into the open to search for scarce food – and this can make it easier to capture them. Your own garden can be a great location; just set up a feeder stocked with a feed mix from the pet shop or a home-made banquet of nuts, berries, seeds, apple pieces and dried fruits, and before you know it you'll have a regular parade of birds dining out in front of you (probably the odd squirrel, too). The beauty of garden photography is that you can often do it from the comfort of your warm house – but remember to minimise reflections by positioning your lens

right up against the glass or, better still, shoot through an open window or door.

- Whether you're a back-garden photographer or prefer going further afield, it's essential for great shots to find out as much about your subjects as possible – how they behave, what times they're most active, and how to photograph them without disturbing them. Do a recce of suitable locations, so you know what to expect and what you can take advantage of, such as hides, camouflaging shrubs, or even your garden shed. It also helps with knowing where the light is best for the shots you have in mind; at dawn or dusk, for example, shoot towards the sun for evocative silhouettes against a beautifully coloured sky.
- Take care with backgrounds – use a wide aperture such as f/2.8 or f/4 for a shallow depth of field that isolates your subject against a defocused background, but take care to ensure your 'prey' is super-sharp, especially the eyes. Frost and snow provide a clean, stark backdrop, but you may need to add in a stop or two of overexposure to ensure the shot is correctly exposed (a very bright background can fool the meter into underexposing for the subject).
- Think about your settings. In the weak, low-angled winter sun, you might have to boost your ISO levels and/or change the aperture to ensure your images aren't underexposed. You'll also need quite fast shutter speeds to freeze movement, which again will be helped by a higher ISO setting. One useful tip is to use [Auto ISO](#) so you have one less setting to worry about. A normal or daylight white balance will ensure consistently neutral results. To be on the safe side, shoot NEF (RAW) instead of, or alongside, JPEGs. This is because RAW shots capture far more information, which gives you much greater scope for tweaking them afterwards with image-editing software.

Quick tips

- Check if you need permission to take pictures – search online for 'permit to photograph wildlife', check out the RSPB's guidance for bird photography, and read the Royal Photographic Society Nature Group's code of practice.
- Choose longer lenses, at least 300mm, so you can comfortably capture your subjects from a distance, and keep downwind where possible – this minimises your chances of disturbing

them.

- Be prepared to hit the deck – shooting kneeling or lying down gives a realistic eye-level image and minimises background distractions. Waterproofs and a groundsheet are obvious essentials for preserving your dignity and comfort!

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