



# Bird Photography

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# Things you'd like for bird photography

- Patience
- Long lens
- Good light
- Fast reflexes
- Fast focus camera body
- Cooperative birds
- Deep pockets



Canon 40D, 17-85mm lens

# Things you often get

- Poor light
- Distant birds
- Inadequate/wrong lens
- Intervening branches and leaves
- Uncooperative birds
- Out of focus bird

How do we maximise chances for  
a good shot?



Canon 5DII, Canon 70-200 F4L

# 1. Equipment

Camera, in order of preference:

1. DSLR (full frame or APS-C)
2. Mirrorless
3. Superzoom/Bridge

15+ MP - the more pixels to crop the better

Accurate and fast auto focus

3+ frames per second



Canon 40D, 100-400mm f4.5-5.8 L



## Equipment (continued)

### Lens

- At least 400mm (300mm if no other option)
- Best you can afford
- Fast - f4 or f5.6
- Auto-focus
- Image stabilisation
- Lens hood



Olympus EM5, 70-300mm

## Equipment (continued)

### Other:

- Spare batteries
- Fast writing cards
- Flash
- Research materials, including a field guide for birds
- Binoculars
- Tripod/monopod
- Suitable clothing



Canon 40D, 100-400mm f4.5-5.8 L

## Types of bird photography

- Perching birds
- Water birds
- Sea birds
- Birds of prey

From a photographic perspective, they need different approaches for focussing, tracking, exposures etc.



Canon 60D, 100-400mm f4.5-5.8 L

# Exposure settings

It depends - on equipment, experience and type of photography

There is no one right approach. If starting out, the following could be a good place to start to get reasonable “bird on stick” photos.

## Shutter speed

- Use 1/focal length rule for minimum shutter speed to maintain sharpness.
- For birds in flight, 1/1600 or faster

## Aperture:

- Usually need wide aperture eg f5.6
- In practice, anything better than f6.4 is a bonus.

## ISO:

- As low as possible, but it's better to risk a bit of noise rather than a blurry image
- Auto ISO is useful - find the point where any higher ISO results in poor images and make it the maximum allowable under Auto ISO.



Canon 5D MkII, 70-200mm f4 L  
1/1600s, f8, ISO 400



# Exposure settings 2

Using fill flash (thanks to Alison Milton)

- high speed sync
- Fast and large capacity cards
- ISO - 400 plus
- 1/1600 of a second or higher for moving birds
- f6.3 to f8.
- Back button focus
- Continuous focus (tracking)
- Single or small number of focus points

Roman Kurywczak (see video later)

- ISO 800 or more
- Manual exposure, meter for a white bird
- 1/1600 or better
- Continuous tracking
- Back button focus



Canon 40D, 100-400mm f4.5-5.8 L

# Other settings

## Continuous shooting:

Getting a great shot is partly a numbers game so set shutter to 3+ frames per second.

## Exposure Metering

Depends on situation - normally centre-weighted is good, but for extremely light or dark birds (eg cockatoos) spot metering may be better.

## Exposure compensation

A fast way to adjust exposure where needed (eg light bird with dark background, backlit birds)

## Flash

Fill flash can help in low light or backlit situations. Usually dialled down 1/3 to 1/2 stop

## Raw or JPEG

Depends on light and user preference.



Pentax K100D, Pentax F 100-300 mm lens

# Focus for birds

Of all the things that go wrong, focus is the most common problem. Like human portraits, the eye must be in focus for an attractive photo.

If birds are close, focus on the eye, if distant, focus on the head.

Depending on the equipment and scenario, single auto focus or continuous focus may be best - experiment with your equipment on backyard birds.

For birds on sticks, I use single shot focus for Canon and continuous for Olympus.

Birds in flight need continuous focus.

Regardless, take several shots - focus gets more accurate if birds are still, and hopefully there will be one sharp one.



Canon 40D, 100-400mm f4.5-5.8 L

# Framing

Consider the background - a soft uncluttered look is nice. Minimise depth of field to just the bird.

Usually cropping is required for smaller birds.

For larger birds, try to keep all of the bird in the frame. Can change the focus point to suit eg at the top of the frame for a large waterbird.



Canon 5DII, 70-200mm f4 L



Canon 40D, 100-400mm f4.5-5.8 L



# Point of view

The best perching bird photos are generally those at the same level as the bird.

This can be difficult, but it is possible to stand on rocks, or use sloping ground to try to get somewhere near the same level.



Canon 40D, 100-400mm f4.5-5.8 L

Pentax K100D, Tamron 60-300mm

# Poses

Once confident, look for opportunities to capture different poses eg preening, hunting, washing, nest building etc



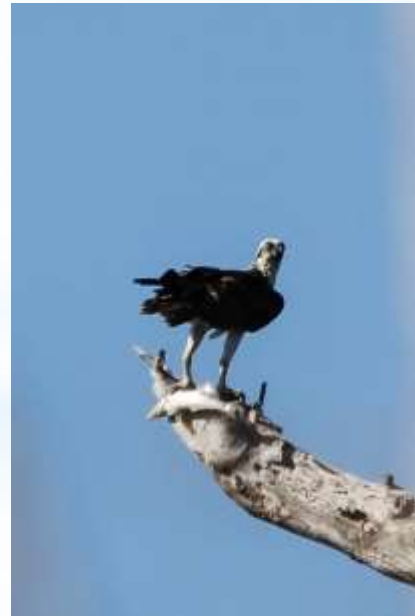
Canon 40D, 100-400mm f4.5-5.8 L



Canon 40D, 100-400mm f4.5-5.8 L

# Sequences

A sequence of photos can tell a story



Canon 60D, 100-400mm f4.5-5.8 L



# Processing

May need to remove distracting clutter in post-processing.

Look for sharpest photos, glint in the eye, and most interesting poses.

Crop as necessary.





## Final words

- Practice
- Persistence
- Patience



Canon 40D, 100-400mm f4.5-5.8 L

# Resources

Feathers and Photos Forum -

[www.feathersandphotos.com.au](http://www.feathersandphotos.com.au)

Richard Hall - [www.richardhallphotography.com/](http://www.richardhallphotography.com/)

Birds in Backyards - [www.birdsinbackyards.net](http://www.birdsinbackyards.net)

Roman Kurywczak (a video revealing his approach to taking water bird photos) -

<http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/promotion/12006/optic-2016.html>