

Photo Talk - Wildlife Photography Challenges



BY SCOTT DENNY—WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER

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Overcoming Wildlife Image Quality Challenges



"Loud & Clear" -© 2015

American Elk in Pennsylvania

In most cases a large mammal is slow moving and easy for you to get your "bead" on it.

Making sure the animals eye is in focus is a critical part of creating quality images.

Canon 7D Mk II
Canon EF 600mm f/4
ISO 800
f/5.6
1/400th sec

For me wildlife photography is both challenging and satisfying. The challenge is to produce an image that is slightly different than one from another photographer. The satisfaction is experiencing nature and seeing things that so many people have not seen.

The focus of this Photo Talk is to identify some of the challenges with wildlife photography and ways to overcome them.

Subject Too Small

Most often wildlife will place a fair amount of energy in avoiding us. Sometimes out of pure excitement we photograph animals that are simply too far away, resulting in an undesirable image.

In far too many cases people will encroach an animals habitat. We really need to remember nature is their home. When we invade their home some will run or fly, others will protect their space.

Ways to overcome this challenge:

- ◇ Invest in a lens between 300mm and 500mm
- ◇ Use a blind and let them come to you
- ◇ Learn your subject and its behaviors
- ◇ Be patient and wait
- ◇ Find shooting locations where wildlife is less jumpy

Don't Forget:

- NATURE IS THEIR HOME
- INVEST IN A LARGE FOCL LENGTH LENS
- MAKE SURE THE ANIMALS EYE IS IN FOCUS
- BE AWARE OF LIGHTING CONDITIONS & LOCATION
- BE PATIENT
- EXPOSE IMAGE FOR DETAIL
- RESPECT YOUR SUBJECT

Subject Not In Focus

There is nothing more frustrating than looking at your LCD to only find your subject is not in focus. Some blur can be okay since it illustrates action. With animals you want to make sure their eyes are always in focus. It is hard to feel good about an image when the subject is in focus but the eye is not.

Ways to overcome this challenge:

- ◇ Keep your cameras focus point on the animals head or eye
- ◇ Select specific focus points rather than letting your camera do so
- ◇ If the subject is on the move, use continuous focus mode and back button focus

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Subject Is Blurred



"As A Button" - © 2013

Whitetail Deer in South-Central Wisconsin.

A subject being out of focus and blurred are two different things. Subject blur is often caused by subject or camera movement. Focus can be locked on the subject but if the camera or subject more the result will be a blurred image.

Ways to overcome this challenge:

- ◇ Use a stabilizing device such as a monopod or tripod
- ◇ Use your lenses stabilization mode, if equipped
- ◇ Use higher shutter speeds
- ◇ Increase ISO to achieve higher shutter speeds

Subject Looking The Wrong Way

Photographing animals can be exciting and bring on an adrenaline rush. It is easy to make the mistake of pressing the shutter too early. Generally speaking it is the head and eyes of the animal you want to capture.

A well done wildlife image does not require the animal to be always looking straight at you. Side views or even looking back over a shoulder are desirable images. In many cases the key is the head and they eyes.

With wildlife photography you will need to have patience or generate patience. If you are not willing to wait and wait, and wait then wildlife photography may not be your cup of tea.

Ways to overcome this challenge:

- ◇ Patiently wait for the animal to turn in the direction you desire
- ◇ Move yourself in a position, if the conditions and respectful distance allow it
- ◇ Grab a Snickers, you gonna be there a while.

**"THE MORE YOU
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THE MORE YOU
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CHANCES OF A
QUALITY IMAGE"**



"No Fear" - © 2010

African Lion in Masai Mara, Kenya

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Signs Of Human Activity

In general wildlife images look best without signs of human activity. Of course, there are always exceptions that can be made.

I have never been one to shy away from photographing captive animals, provided the establishment appears reputable and the animal is healthy. With a little creativity you can create some really nice images taken through glass and fences.

Ways to overcome this challenge:

- ◇ Create natural perches near bird feeders
- ◇ Place bird feeders near natural perches
- ◇ Use a larger focal length lens to obtain tightly cropped images in zoo's
- ◇ When shooting through glass move lens close to glass to prevent reflections
- ◇ When shooting through glass prevent reflections by shooting in shaded area
- ◇ When shooting through fences stand about 8-10 feet from the fence
- ◇ When shooting through fences wait for your subject to be 10 feet or more from fence
- ◇ When shooting through fence use a single focal point to prevent lens from searching

Depth Of Field Too Shallow

This can be a challenge with close range photography of small subjects (birds) with lenses over 400mm in focal length. Depth of Field drops dramatically as large apertures are used.

Ways to overcome this challenge:

- ◇ Stay aware of lens size, aperture setting, and subject distance
- ◇ Increase ISO setting to allow for smaller aperture settings

Poorly Lit Subject

Lighting plays a big role in image detail and color quality. Preferably a subject that is front or side lit is considered ideal. There have been outstanding wildlife images taken in rain, fog, and gloomy conditions. The more you understand light and how to expose for it, the more "keepers" will be on your memory card.

Ways to overcome this challenge

- ◇ Position yourself to avoid backlit and extreme side lit conditions
- ◇ Experiment with metering modes and exposure compensation to help manage conditions
- ◇ Try to avoid midday and extremely bright sunny day shooting
- ◇ Use artificial fill light, such as a speedlite and Better Beamer, to extend light to the subject
- ◇ If possible, wait for lighting conditions to change

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"I'm Ready" - © 2014

Taken Through Fence



Fotos For Phun

"I don't know everything about photography but everything I do know I will share."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SCOTT DENNY

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Brief Bio

Scott is an enrolled member of the Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin. He was born and raised in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Scott is a self taught photographer and has been taking photos for slightly over thirty years.

His passion is wildlife, outdoor, and landscape photography. Scott has been published in multiple magazines, various publishing's, and has images utilized by a number of web pages.

Scott regularly travels the Upper Midwest having photographed wildlife and nature in Wisconsin, Upper Michigan, Minnesota, Illinois, and Indiana. He has also spent time photographing in South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, West Virginia, and Kenya, Africa.

Scott's Gear of Choice

Camera Bodies

- Canon 7D Mark II with Canon BG-E16 Battery Grip
- Canon 7D Mark II with Canon BG-E16 Battery Grip (second body)

Lenses

- Canon EF 600mm f/4 L IS USM
- Canon EF 400mm f/5.6L USM
- Canon EF 70-200mm f/4L USM
- Tamron SP 28-75mm f/2.8 XR Di LD-IF
- Sigma 10-20mm f/4-5.6 EX DC HSM
- Canon EF 1.4x Extender

Tripods & Heads

- Induro GIT404XL Tripod Legs
- Wimberley WH-200 Gimbal Head
- Vanguard Abebo Plus 363AT Tripod Legs
- Induro BHL3 Ball Head
- Induro GHBA Gimbal Head

Final Thoughts:

Invading an animal's space is the cardinal sin of wildlife photography.

It is easy to get excited about an opportunity to photograph a particular animal. Invading space to get that shot is selfish and inconsiderate. The challenge here is our use of common sense.

Disrespecting an animal's space cannot only result in a disruption of their lives; it can result in the death of an animal if it chooses to protect its space of family.

Overcome this challenge by:

- ◇ Keep a respectful distance
- ◇ Use a blind
- ◇ Purchase a lens with larger focal length

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