

* 7 Tips for Flight Photography *

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1. *Use a gimbal head.

I prefer a gimbal to a ball head because when I let go it stays in place. A ball head, on the other hand, flops over. Truthfully, for flight photography, hand-held is the best way to go because it provides the ultimate flexibility; however, since I use a 600mm that's just too heavy to do hand-held!

2. *Make it manual.

Relying on semi-automatic modes such as shutter or aperture priority causes exposure to change as your background changes. Start with an exposure about +1 2/3 stops from the sky. Then check your histogram after the first couple of shots to fine tune.

3. *Set your focus limit switch.

Most lenses have a switch to limit the range of focus. Set that switch to the far range. This limits the amount of hunting the lens does as it tries to acquire focus.

4. *Keep that shutter speed up.

To stop flight action you'll need a minimum of 1/500th of a second. Don't be afraid to bump up the ISO to get it; with modern DSLR's, quality has become so good you can pull off bumping ISO higher than ever before.

5. *Adjust focus tracking sensitivity.

This seems counterintuitive, but in flight photography you'll typically adjust focus tracking to the slow side. The reason is that, while it doesn't seem to affect your initial focus acquisition, it *does* buy precious time if your focus point slips off the bird or something momentarily comes between you and the bird while panning with it.

6. *Pan faster.

Those new to flight photography often make the mistake of panning too slowly. It may seem obvious, but this one simple rule is the one most often overlooked: your tracking speed must match the speed of the bird.

7. Practice on moving objects.

Head to a busy roadside or a bike trail to practice photographing objects that move quickly. Zooming cars, bustling bicyclers, and runners all make great subjects for practicing your flight-photography skills. That way when time comes to take the shots you really want they won't get away!

**Award-winning nature & wildlife photographer, Jeff Parker,
leads photo tours & workshops for the naturally curious™
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