

# \* 7 Tips for Wildlife Photography \*

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## 1 Background, background, background!

A busy jumble of sticks, bright spots, or other distracting background elements commonly ruin otherwise fine photos. Sometimes you can't do a thing about it, but quite often you can. Don't spend an hour in Photoshop doing something you can easily do in mere seconds in the field! For example, a simple change of position or waiting just a bit for an animal to change *its* position frequently does the trick. A bird in a tree with bright spots of sky showing through makes creating a non-distracting background extra challenging. Try moving until a solid clump of leaves backs the bird. Bottom line: you want the viewer's eye to go to your subject *first*, not to undeserving distractions.

## 2 Get that eye sharp.

When photographing animals at least one eye must be sharp. Even if you don't have enough depth of field to cover the entire animal you can still create a keeper if the eye is sharp. Viewers look to the eye first & if they find fuzziness there they intuit that the image lacks "life."

## 3 More than one's merrier.

Since wildlife is, well, *wild* you can't dictate how many subjects show up. But if you have a choice of photographing a loner or aiming your lens at two or more go for the plural. While one animal can certainly exhibit action (*e.g., eating, hissing, posturing, etc.*), when two collect, action can become *interaction*. That tends to make more compelling images.

## 4 Get on your subject's level.

Mammal, bird, insect, frog, even flower images feel much more intimate if shot at their level. Doing so helps put viewers emotionally into the scene. Shots taken from above or below, on the other hand, reinforce viewer-subject separation.

## 5 Be patient.

Waiting for the right light, waiting for an animal to do something besides sit there, waiting for the best head position—we could almost call nature photography "The Waiting Game." But you've heard the saying "Good things come to those who wait," right? Well, it especially applies to photographing natural scenes & subjects.

## 6 Come to grips with exposure theory.

Today's digital cameras do a very good job when left to their own devices. However, there are still times—many of them—when you need to help your camera out with exposure compensation. In particular, when faced with bright backgrounds (*e.g. snow, white skies*), auto modes tend to underexpose. In such situations, it's up to you to take charge & tell your camera to expose for the subject. (*Your histogram is your friend!*)

## 7 Start before you arrive.

Take time to learn about your wild subject before you arrive to shoot it. Understanding how it utilizes habitat, recognizing body language clues that signal impending action, & knowing when the animal is most active are the type of info that helps you get shots that stand apart from the rest.

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Award-winning nature & wildlife photographer, Jeff Parker, leads photo tours & workshops for the naturally curious™ throughout the U.S., Central & South America & India.

- (512) 378-3355
- JParker@ExploreinFocus.com
- ExploreinFocus.com

