

# 7 Key Pieces of Gear for Wildlife Photography

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## 1) Telephoto lens

A good telephoto lens is the number one essential piece for wildlife photography. It takes a great big lens to photograph itty, bitty birds as well as far-away animals! Get the longest lens you can afford. This used to mean 400mm. That was the limit before getting into stratospheric prices, but these days you'll find good—and affordable – options from Tamron and Sigma with their 150-600mm zooms.

## 2) Tripod

I know some people try and do without a tripod, but I sure don't recommend it. Vibration reduction (VR in Nikon) /image stabilization (IS in Canon) has come a long way and you might get acceptable results hand holding a long lens, but you'll always get better results with a tripod. Long lenses are heavy! When using a tripod you can train the lens on your subject and wait for the action or gesture. Just make sure you get a tripod that is sturdy enough.

## 3) Gimbal head

This accessory will make using your tripod a joy! Ball heads are fine for landscape photography (they're made to be positioned and locked down). But gimbal heads are made for action. A correctly positioned 600mm f/4 lens on a gimbal head becomes effortless to move and will stay in any position you leave it in. I'd be lost without my gimbal!

## 4) Gear bag

This is a tricky one. You need a bag that's big enough to hold your longest lens, yet will still fit in the overhead bins during flights. Such bags do exist! If you carry a 600mm prime like I do you'll be best served with a backpack-style bag. Roller bags are nice, but the wheels and handle add to the dimensions. In my experience a backpack is also less likely to be singled out and checked for weight and size restrictions. I'm hesitant to recommend a specific bag because new "models" come out regularly so there's a good chance that what I write here today will be outdated tomorrow (*to wit: my Gura Gear backpack, which I love but is no longer sold*).

## 5) Teleconverter

Teleconverters increase the effective focal length of your lens. That said, they're generally best used with prime lenses. They do cause a reduction in the maximum aperture—one stop for a 1.4x and two stops for a 2x. This means your 500mm f/4 lens becomes a 1000mm f/8 lens with a 2x teleconverter.

## 6) Headlamp

Wildlife is most active at dawn and dusk. That means us wildlife photographers are often setting up or packing up in the dark. Sometimes we're even hiking in or out of our shot location in the dark. And while in the tropics, a night-photography hike is a must-do! Having a headlamp (*versus a flashlight*) frees your hands up for shooting as well as carrying your gear.

## 7) Camera

Obviously, you can't photograph wildlife without a camera, but you might be surprised to learn that just about any camera made in the last 5 years will probably do the job just fine. If you do go shopping specifically for a wildlife camera keep in mind that the most important features are a fast and accurate autofocus as well as good performance at high ISO's. A fast frame rate comes in handy for capturing different wing positions when photographing birds in flight.

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**Award-winning nature & wildlife photographer, Jeff Parker, leads photo tours & workshops for the naturally curious throughout Latin America and the Southwestern U.S.**

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