

7 Tips for Better Bird Photography

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1. Action!

Try to capture the birds *doing* something. An image of virtually any behavior will be more interesting than a bird just sitting on a stick.

2. Where's the wind?

Pay attention to the wind. Birds almost always take-off & land *into* the wind. If the breeze is at your back the birds will be facing you as they take-off & land.

3. Look for the tell.

Speaking of taking-off, many bird species have a "tell." Before they launch, most raptors will lighten the load. If you see 'em squirt, get ready! Sandhill cranes will lean into the wind. Other birds will crouch briefly before springing into the air. The better you know your birds the more of these signs you'll be able to interpret.

4. Shoot that song.

Songbirds are so named because they sing so capturing them belting out a ballad can create compelling shots. Get them backlit on a cold morning the song might even be visible (*in other words, you can see its breath*).

5. Showing their stuff.

Courtship displays are some of the very best opportunities to get great shots. Prairie chickens & sage grouse males gather on leks to display together. Some tropical birds—such as the Cock-of-the-Rock—do this as well. Cranes dance, turkeys strut... you get the idea!

6. Focus on the fight.

Sometimes courtship displays lead to fights. I've seen Whooping Cranes, turkeys, Painted Buntings & other species mix it up. This action can be tough to catch but can also result in some interesting images.

7. Shoot them sharing a meal.

Keep an eye out for one bird feeding another. During courtship, the male of some species will feed the female. This may be a way of proving that he's a good provider. More commonly you'll see recently-fledged juveniles looking for a handout from Mom or Dad.

Award-winning nature & wildlife photographer, Jeff Parker, leads photo tours & workshops for the naturally curious throughout North, Central & South America. Please join him!

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

