



BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY

BIRDS BLOGGERS TIPS – Here is a streamlined guide

If you've ever spent an afternoon crouched in the bushes, amongst the woodland or staring up at the sky, you know that bird photography is one of the most rewarding—and let's be honest, *infuriating*—hobbies out there.

There is nothing quite like the rush of finally nailing that perfect shot of a bird mid-dive or the quiet beauty of a Robin perched on a mossy branch. If you're ready to level up your birding game, grab a coffee, and let's dive into how to capture these feathered wonders like a pro.



The Gear: What's in My Bag?

As a beginner you don't need to mortgage your house for gear, but birds are tiny and fast, so you need a bit of "reach."

- **The Lens:** The Big lens is always a good one for this type of photography like the telephoto lens - at least **300mm**, but **500mm or 600mm** is the "sweet spot." Birds are shy; if you get too close, they're gone. A zoom lens (like a 150-600mm) is perfect because it gives you flexibility. At present I am using my 50-250mm, but my Nikon z50ii give me an extra 125mm so this works well for me.
- **The Body:** A camera that can shoot a high number of **frames per second (FPS)** is your best friend. When that bird takes off, you want to be firing like a machine gun.
- **Support:** For stationary shots, a **tripod** with either a gimbal head or a ball head is a lifesaver. If you're tracking birds in flight, many people prefer a **monopod** or even shooting handheld if your lens isn't too heavy, as it gives you more freedom to swing the camera upward.



Capturing the "Still Life": Stationary Birds

When a bird is perched, you have time to be an artist. Your goal here is **tack-sharp eyes** and a **creamy background**.

- **The Settings:**
 - **Aperture (f-stop):** Shoot "wide open" (the lowest number your lens allows, like **f/4** or **f/5.6**). This creates that gorgeous "bokeh" background that makes the bird pop.
 - **Shutter Speed:** Even when sitting still, birds twitch. Keep your shutter setting to at least **1/1000s** to ensure there's no micro-blur.
 - **Focus Mode:** Use **Single Point AF**. Place that little square right on the bird's eye. If the eye isn't sharp, the photo won't work!
 - **The Technique:** Look for the "catchlight" - that tiny spark of sun reflecting in the bird's eye. It brings the creature to life. Also, try to get down to the bird's eye level; shooting "up" at a bird on a branch usually looks like a snapshot, but, if you can, shooting level with it will feel more like an intimate portrait.
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The Main Event: Birds in Flight (BIF)

This is the ultimate test of your patience and your camera's autofocus. It's chaotic, fast, and totally addictive.

- **The Settings:**
 - **Shutter Speed:** Speed is king here. You need at least **1/2000s** or **1/3200s**. If you go slower, the wingtips will be a blurry mess.
 - **ISO:** Don't be afraid of a little noise! Set your ISO to **Auto** (with a cap at maybe 6400) because the light changes constantly as a bird moves from sky to trees.
 - **Focus Mode:** Switch to **Continuous AF (AF-C or AI Servo)**. This tells the camera to keep recalculating the focus as the bird moves toward or away from you.
 - **The Technique: The "Pan and Follow."** Start tracking the bird from a distance before you start shooting. Get your focus locked, and as it flies past, move your whole body from the hips, keeping the bird in the centre of the frame. Once the moment looks right, hold down that shutter and let it rip!
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Blogger's Secret Tips for Success

1. **Know Your Subject:** Spend time watching them without the camera. You'll start to notice "tells" - like a hawk pooping or a heron leaning forward - which usually means they are about to take flight.
2. **The Golden Hour:** Always, always shoot in the early morning or late afternoon. The light is soft and golden, which prevents those harsh shadows under the wings and "blown out" white feathers.
3. **Respect the Space:** Never bait birds or get so close that they change their behaviour. A great photo isn't worth stressing out a local resident!

Bird photography is a marathon, not a sprint. You'll come home with 500 photos and maybe only 5 "keepers," but those 5 will be absolute magic.

What's the most elusive bird you've been trying to catch on camera lately? Let me know in the comments section on my website!

SUMMARY:

To really give your photos that "wow" factor that separates a hobbyist from a pro, you need to master the tiny details. Here are my top "insider" tips to give your bird photography that extra edge and razor-sharp finish:



1. The "Eye-Level" Rule

Most people take photos of birds by standing up and pointing the camera at the ground or up into a tree. To make your photos feel intimate and "professional," you need to get on their level. If the bird is on the sand, lie on your belly. If it's on a low bush, crouch down. When the viewer is looking directly into the bird's eyes on a horizontal plane, the connection is much more powerful.



2. Master the "Catchlight"

A bird's eye can look like a flat, black marble if the light isn't hitting it right. For a photo to "pop," you need a catchlight - that tiny white sparkle of reflected sunlight in the eye. It gives the bird a soul and makes it look alive. If the sun is behind you, you'll usually get this naturally. If it's overcast, try to wait until the bird turns its head toward a brighter part of the sky.



3. Use "Back-Button Focus"

This is a total gamechanger for sharpness. Normally, your camera focuses when you press the shutter halfway. By moving the focus function to a button on the back of the camera (usually labelled AF-ON), you separate "focusing" from "taking the picture."

This allows you to lock focus on a stationary bird and wait for the perfect moment without the camera hunting for focus again when you finally press the shutter.



4. Watch Your Backgrounds (The "Bokeh" Effect)

A sharp bird is great, but a messy, distracting background of twigs and leaves will sometimes ruin the shot. To get that creamy, blurred-out background:

- Increase the distance between the bird and the background.
- Decrease the distance between you and the bird.

The further the trees are behind the bird, the more they will melt into a beautiful, soft wash of colour that makes your subject stand out.



5. The "Shutter Speed" Safety Net

When you're using a long telephoto lens, even the tiny vibration of your heartbeat or the wind can cause "camera shake," making your photos look slightly soft. A good rule of thumb for sharpness is the Reciprocal Rule:

If you are shooting at 600mm, your shutter speed should be at least 1/600s for stationary birds but ideally double that (1/1200s) to be safe. For birds in flight, push it even higher to 1/2500s or more.



6. Use a "Fast" Memory Card

This isn't about the photo itself, but about the moment. If you have a slow memory card and you fire off 20 shots in a row (burst mode), your camera will "buffer" and stop taking photos while it saves them. High-speed birds wait for no one! Use a V60 or V90 SD card so your camera never skips a beat during the action.



7. Post-Processing: The "De-Noise" Miracle

To get those high shutter speeds, you'll often have to use a high ISO, which can make the photo look "grainy." Modern AI tools (like Lightroom's Denoise AI) are incredible. They can strip away the digital noise while keeping the feather detail sharp. Don't be afraid of "noisy" photos - they are much easier to fix than "blurry" ones!

Which of these technical tweaks are you most excited to try out on your next outing? Personally, Back-Button Focus was the one that changed my time out in the field!