Photo Geek Tips

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Begin all wildlife photos sessions with clean flash card in the camera and the camera programmed to a set of adjustments that you use habitually. From those familiar setting, you can easily and instinctively readjust to suit the wildlife's action and varying light conditions. Example: 200 ISO – Shutter Priority mode – 125/sec shutter speed - RAW quality –Auto white balance.

Know how to manipulate your camera's settings without taking the camera body away from your eye.

Know how to quickly switch from auto-focus to manual focus when shooting through brush or twigs.

Use the camera's "C" Continuous for subjects such as flying birds, swimming ducks etc. in open settings. CAUTION: (Moving the focus sensor off of the main subject triggers refocusing)

In forested settings, use the "S" Single Servo focus setting so that you can selectively focus on the subject's eye and re-compose the shot without the focus changing.

Use "Auto-focus lock" on static subjects to eliminate refocusing with each shutter release push.

For fine art, printing and magazine publication purposes shoot in the RAW format. JPEGS are fine for newspaper publication and on-line uses. When shooting JPEGs; use the Large-fine file size setting.

Set your camera's "Color Space" to "Abobe RGB (1998), not sRGB.

NOTE: When opening an image, created in a different color space, into Photoshop, the "Embedded Profile Mismatch" warning box will appear. Simply select "*Convert document's colors to the working space.*"

TIP: Configure Photoshop for the Adobe RGB (1998) color space to match your camera's Adobe RGB (1998) color space setting. To do so, click on the "Edit" menu in the upper task bar and in the drop-down menu, click > on "Color settings." In the "Settings" box, select "North American Prepress 2" from the drop-down menu. You will note that the "Working space" box contains "Adobe RGB (1998). Click> OK.

NOTE: If you are using "Lightroom," to process your images, select "ProPhoto RGB.

When shooting JPEGS, select in-camera image enhancements that are one step down from the strongest.

When shooting in RAW, turn off all in-camera image enhancements.

Avoid shooting telephoto zoom lens at their greatest magnification where they typically impart softness. Simply back the zoom off a bit for better quality.

Determine your telephoto lens' sweet spot, (where image sharpness is best), it will often lie in the F-5.6 to F-8 range.

For enhanced photo sharpness, try matching shutter speed with lens magnifications; such as 300/sec shutter speed at 300mm lens setting.
NOTE: Telephoto lenses are great, but nothing beats getting close to your subject.

Shoot on "Continuous High Speed" mode and fire at least three (3) frames in rapid succession. Often the second or third frame will be the sharpest.

Bracket exposures by setting your camera to fire a sequence of three shots; one at the camera's light meter value, another ½ F-stop over and another ½ F-stop under.

Learn to read your histogram and try to shoot to its right or bright side, without blowing out highlights.

Shoot in the "M" Manual mode for the greatest creative flexibility and check your exposures via the histogram or LCD panel.

Consider shooting in Nikon's "S" or Canon's "Tv" priority mode when photographing wildlife. This permits you to select the shutter speed to suit subject action while the camera selects a matching F-stop.

Shoot with both eyes open to avoid view-finder tunnel vision. Photographing with both eyes open aids detection of approaching wildlife or dynamic changes in the overall scene.

If at all possible, photograph wildlife subjects on the same plane i.e. at ground level or the water's surface etc.

Use a set of carpenters knee pads for protection and comfort while gittin' down for better photo angles.

A boat-seat-cushion, throwable life preserver, is a comfortable and waterproof photographer's seat. Via a carabineer, its straps can be easily clipped to ones belt loop or camera bag.

Always focus upon a subject's eyes unless the purpose of the image is to highlight a certain portion of the animal's anatomy. Be certain to focus upon the eye closest to the camera.

If at all possible, capture a highlight or catch-light reflection upon at least one eye's surface.

When using "VR or "IS" equipped lenses it is important to activate the stabilization system and allow a second or two for it to begin working. It is often audible in quiet locations. This practice also facilitates proper auto focusing.

If the camera is locked down on a tripod, the lens' "VR" or "IS" system should be switched off. Refer to the lens' manual.

To easily and effectively provide additional support for cameras equipped with "VR of "IS" lenses use a set of rifle shooting sticks, such as a BogPod tripod, bipod or monopod. www.BogGear.com. Simply lay the lens into the shooting rest as one would a rifle. NOTE: Bog Pod offers an optional "Switcheroo" head system that includes and an interchangeable ball head and a wide U-shaped rest, that is very suitable to camera lens,

The "Molar" bean bag is a superbly effective camera rest that is used in the same manner as a rifle marksman's sand bag. It is shaped like a dual-rooted molar tooth and is the perfect camera rest for shooting from an automobile. The roots straddle the vehicle's open window. It is available through Vertex Photographic – www.Vertexphoto.com. (972) 395-3458.

Use portable reflectors to bounce light into shadows. Commercial reflectors are available in various sizes and different reflective surfaces. They are easily collapsible for storage. Bounce flash off of reflectors for unique lighting effects.

To extend battery life, turn off the automatic LCD display option and preview images only on demand. This also eliminates tell-tale illumination of your face when you are concealed in a blind.

Use optional battery packs for pro camera bodies. Their price is worth the freedom of extended shooting, improved hand grip, as well as an additional shutter release and focus sensor control.

Use a good quality circular polarizing filter to remove glare from reflective surfaces, saturate colors and make rainbows pop dramatically. A polarizing filter can also enhances hero shots containing colorful fish and help control light flare from reflective scales.

Avoid using "Skylight" or UV filters on your high-quality lens.

Do not stack add-on lens filters. Doing so degrades image quality.

Always use your manufacture-supplied lens hood to protect your objective lens from damage, block peripheral light from influencing the light meter and prevent light flare on the lens' surface. Most importantly, it channels the light reflected from your subject directly into the lens.

You can get too close. Filling the frame with the subject limits post processing cropping and resizing flexibility. Move away or zoom out and shoot multiple frames of the subject.

Memory – Image storage

Always format your flash cards. Don't just delete images from them.

Always carry extra batteries and flash cards. Use only high-quality, fast write speed cards.

When using multiple camera bodies; consider keeping flash cards for each separate. If not, be certain to format the memory card each time it is inserted into the camera.

Do not shoot flash cards completely full. Doing so can cause loss of data. This is especially critical with RAW files.

Use separate memory cards to record varied subjects, photographed on the same day, to simplify image filing and recovery. Example: Whitetail bucks in the morning and a kid's fishing derby in the evening.

Back up your photos on hard drives rather than compact discs. 1 or 2 TB drives are best. Consider using an automatic dual-drive back up system as are available from Western Digital or Dobro.

PHOTO PROCESSING TIPS

Set Photoshop's Bridge or Lightroom's photo downloader to automatically embed your copyright upon downloading images from memory cards. (See TIP on creating a custom © brush)

Set Photoshop's Bridge downloader to automatically copy downloaded images to a backup storage site of your choice.

Be certain to include the "shot date" in the file name/data when down loading and storing images. This aids location of files.

Calibrate your computer monitor monthly. Use a good quality calibration unit such as the Spyder 3 Elite. Use a calibration unit that continuously monitors ambient light.

Consider purchasing and using noise reduction software such as "Define" or "Noise Ninja."
Noise reduction can be applied to the Luminance channel in LAB. Doing so affects no color data.

Use the LAB mode in Photoshop when processing RAW files.

Sharpen the Luminance channel in LAB mode.

Adjust the "Shadow –Highlight" settings in the Luminance channel of the LAB mode.

Remember to brighten images prior to printing. There is a great difference between viewing the image in projected light (on a monitor) versus light reflected from a print. The print will always be darker. Each medium, paper or canvas, has a specific profile that can be programmed into high-end printers.

Always save the original RAW file, in its unaltered state, on a hard drive. (Back up your best images on two drives)

Consider saving a PSD (PhotoShop Document) version of photos that you've processed, so that you have the option of readjustment.

If you use discs for image storage; select Delkin Devices Archival Gold or Silver discs and store them standing on edge rather than stacked on their flat sides.

Key word carefully and save the "Metadata template." The saved template can be easily applied to files or folders containing similar subjects. (A real time saver)

Become an NAPP member (National Association of Photoshop Professionals) www.photoshopuser.com.

Bonus Geek Tip

TIP: Create your own custom, copyright or credit line brush in Photoshop and it can be easily added to images with a click of the mouse. Here's how:

On the upper task bar, click> New
In the window/box that opens, set the dimensions to "inches."
Input a width of 6 inches and height of 2 inches. *Size is optional.*
Set the resolution to 300 DPI.
In the "Background Contents" window, select "Transparent" from the drop-down menu.
Click> OK to open the new document window. It will appear in 6x2 inch dimensions.
Select the "T" Text tool.
Select the center option on the upper task bar. Center the cursor and the type your notice.
To apply the © symbol; hold down the Alt key and type 0169 in the number pad.
Type your name, studio name, URL, etc. after the © symbol.
Click out of the Type tool.
Click>Edit on the upper task bar and in the drop-down menu, click> "Define brush presets."
In the window that opens you may name the brush and click> OK.
Your new Copyright brush is instantly added to the brush panel.

To apply the custom brush, simply click on it in the brush panel and then hover the cursor over an open image to see the brush in preview. At that time, you may select the font style, size, color, opacity and placement of the brush. **TIP**: The brush is easily resized via the keyboard bracket keys; **[** to enlarge; **]** to shrink its size.

Click the left mouse button to apply the copyright brush to your image.