



Wildlife Photography

basic principles

by mat thompson

These principles should provide the wildlife photographer with a good foundation to take great wildlife photos. But don't forget rules are there only as a guide, break them if you're feeling creative!

Know your camera and the basics of exposure, shutter speed and depth of field

Understanding the basics of how a camera works will give you more control and flexibility.

Know your subject

Different animals behave in different ways. Some will let you get close others won't. Some are active in the morning others in the evening. Understanding your subject will really shorten the odds in getting a good picture.

Field skill

Take your time when approaching an animal. Consider its 'circle of fear' and use your surroundings to break up your movement and hide your silhouette. Respect the subjects your photographing and remember. 'Take only photographs leave only footprints'!

Light

Consider your light conditions and where your 'key light' (usually the Sun) is. Early morning and evening shots will create richer less harsh shadowing with better depth, colour and subtlety, while the angle of your light can be used to add drama, definition or a point of focus.

Composition

Consider the rule of thirds and frame your subject in a interesting and emotive way. Also consider elements like shadows, reflections, and colour and the way they work within your image.

Get on your subjects level

Bring the viewer into your animals world by getting on their level. This might mean kneeling or even laying down on the ground. You'll be amazed how this perspective changes the perception of your subject.

Look for action, personality and drama

A picture should try and tell a story. Try to get a photograph that best reflects the situation and behaviour you are looking at. Look for those special moments that best define what you're watching.

Consider the setting or background

Think about the way your background colours and shapes affect your subject. Often the way a background is used can make a picture. Also consider using foreground elements to help your composition.

It's all in the eyes

The eyes are crucial to create good expression in a picture. Try to make them your point of focus.

Good support

Use a tripod, monopod, tree or fence post to steady your shots if possible, especially when not using higher shutter speeds.

And finally, enjoy yourself, there's an amazing natural world out there to discover...and photograph!

