

Photographing Birds



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www.FlagpolePhotographers.com

How to get started photographing birds



Equipment and Camera Settings



Photographing in your yard



Attracting birds



Habits



Lighting



Background



Composition



Post-Processing



Practice, Patience, and Perseverance





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Equipment

- Camera (or cell phone) – The best camera is the one you have with you!
- Lens – Yes, bigger might be better...
- Tripod – Or sturdy surface like a railing, rock or window sill

Try to keep your camera and all electronics dry!



Camera Settings

Fast Shutter Speeds – Freezes motion

- Small birds might get close, but are often fast and erratic.
- Need a very fast shutter speed for birds in flight.



200 mm lens, 1/1000s



Larger birds often have slower and soaring flight,
but many times are higher up and further away.
Longer lenses and fast shutters help here.



1/6400s

Turkey Vulture



1/8000s

Osprey



1/6400s

Bald Eagle



1/8000s

Bald Eagle

200mm lens on all



Aperture (Lens Opening)

Affects how much depth is in focus

f/2.8 = Shallow depth. Small number, small amount in focus. Lets in more light.

f/22 = Deep depth. Large number, large amount in focus. Lets in less light.



f/4.0

Shallow Depth of Field:
Bird is in focus but
background blurred

Song Sparrow

Portrait vs.
Including
Habitat

Sweet Spot for
image
sharpness is in
between



f/14.0

Deep Depth of Field:
Bird and the background
are both more in focus

White-throated Sparrow



ISO – Sensitivity of the image sensor to light

Choose lowest possible ISO that still allows a fast enough shutter speed to reduce motion blur.



1/250s, f/5.6, ISO 3200
Crimson Rosella Parrot

Higher ISO: Less light is required so you can use faster shutter speeds, but photo has more noise or grain. Use in darker settings to keep speed up.

Lower ISO: Produces less noise and graininess, but more light is required. Tradeoffs are slower shutter speeds and/or aperture changes.



Continuous, or Burst, Mode

- Takes several photos in quick succession by pressing the shutter button and holding it down.
- Increases the odds one turns out when your opportunity of capturing something is short.



Great



Continuous, or Burst, Mode



Great Egret – The one that turned out



Converted to Monochrome



Great Egret in Monochrome



Autofocus – Single Area vs. Continuous Tracking



Female Yellow-rumped Warbler

Main Objective: Focus on the eye and keep it sharp!

Single Area: Not moving or perched, use One-Shot AF for Canon or AF-S for Nikon.

Continuous Tracking: Moving or in flight, use AI Servo for Canon or AF-C for Nikon. “Sports mode” on some cameras. Tracks motion and predicts where the subject will be, placing the focus at that predicted point.

Consider using AF-On Button if you are switching back and forth.



JPEG vs. RAW

RAW provides more opportunities to bring out detail than JPEG files



JPEG



RAW

Tufted Titmouse



A steady camera = sharper photos

- Don't try to take a photo while walking.
- Tuck your elbows in.
- Squeeze shutter release.
- Use something as a brace to keep your camera still. Lean against a tree or set camera on a rock or ledge.












Motion Blur



Steadier

Red-shouldered Hawk Camera



-  Equipment and Camera Settings
-  **Photographing in your yard**
-  Attracting birds
-  Habits
-  Lighting
-  Background
-  Composition
-  Post-Processing
-  Practice, Patience, and Perseverance



Your own yard – A great place to start

- Convenience
- Control
- Create



Creating the “Nature” Scene

“Nature” Category in Photo Competitions



White-throated Sparrow

Not allowed:

- No human elements. Nothing that shows evidence of the “hand of man.” This includes cut grass, fences, stone walls, roads.
- No human hybrid plants, cultivated plants, feral animals, domestic animals or mounted animals.

*Not a complete list. For more details see:
Photographic Society of America
<https://psa-photo.org/index.php?nature-nature-definition>



“Nature” Photography

“Nature” Category in Photo Competitions

Not allowed:

- Nothing that shows evidence of the “hand of man.”



Great Horned Owl



House Wren



American Robin



House Sparrow



“Nature” Photography

Allowed:

“Scientific bands, scientific tags or radio collars on wild animals are permissible.”



White-throated Sparrow



Common Loon

*Not a complete list. For more details see:

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How to attract birds into your yard

Food – Birdseed/food or seedbearing plants

Water – For drinking & bathing

Shelter – Nest boxes, trees, shrubs or ground cover



Female Ruby-throated Hummingbird



Warning: Feeding birds may also attract other animals...



Black-capped Chickadee



Female Eastern Gray Squirrel



Squirrels will come, but just photograph them too!



Eastern Gray Squirrel



And all their relatives...



Eastern Gray Squirrels



Don't put food by nests as other predators may find them and their babies



Juvenile House Sparrow



Small birds and animals may attract bigger birds...



Juvenile Red-shouldered Hawk



**That hawk wasn't really posing for a photo.
He was waiting for his dinner hiding under
the BBQ...**

Squirrel waited for
the hawk to leave
and got away!



Eastern Gray Squirrel



Put food out in the morning. Overnight food sources invite raccoons and bears into your yard too!



North American Raccoon



North American Brown Bear



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Know your birds – www.birds.cornell.edu



How to Identify Bird Songs

Bird Academy's latest self-paced course
jump-starts your birding-by-ear skills

▶ [Learn more](#)

Common Yellowthroat © Linda Petersen

A photograph of a Common Yellowthroat bird perched on a thin branch, facing left with its beak open as if singing. The bird has a bright yellow throat and breast, a black face mask, and olive-green wings and back. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green.



What are their habits?

Do they always land on the same branch?

See if they perch first before going in for the food. If so, try pre-focusing there.



Black-capped Chickadee



**Notice which birds perch longer than others
They are easier to photograph.**



Juvenile Red-shouldered Hawk



Male Northern Cardinal, Dark-eyed Junco



**The closer the birds will get to you the better
Especially if you don't have a big lens!**



70mm lens, Flying about 25 feet overhead 1/1000s

Snowy Owl



Time of Year

Are they here for the winter or do they migrate?



Dark-eyed Juncos



Male Northern Cardinal



Active in fall preparing for winter



Female Downy Woodpecker



Active in spring when mating and nesting

And you might get treated to hearing a beautiful song too!



American Robin



Activity near nesting sites when feeding young



Chipping Sparrows



Behaviors a bird often does just before it takes off to fly

- Stands very alert
- Turns its head in all directions
- Turns into the wind

May poop to “lighten the load.”
Especially larger birds.



American Crow



Western Gull



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Golden Hours: Morning or late in the day



Oystercatcher

The best light is found just after sunrise and just before sunset when the light is warmer and more subdued.

It will bring out the color and texture in the birds' plumage.



Partly Cloudy Day vs. Harsh, Direct Sun



Male House Finch



Blue Jay



Location of Light Source

Where does the sun fall between you and the bird?

Sun is behind me and slightly to the left.

Note: Catch light in eye.



Male House Finch



Backlighting vs. Sun at Your Back



Dark-eyed Junco



Sulfur-crested Cockatoos



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Does the background help tell the story?
If not, keep it simple and non-distracting.



Background shows some of the surroundings and habitat, but doesn't distract from the bird.

Great Blue Heron



Background should compliment the bird, not draw attention away from it

Background is subtle
and keeps the focus
on the bird.



Female House Finch



Blending in with the background



Pacific Black Duck

Camouflage might be better for the bird than for the photo.

A brown duck in brown water doesn't "pop" out of the photo.



Choose a background where the bird stands out



Gouldian Finch



Red-shouldered Hawk



Separation of background



If background is further away, it is easier to blur.

300mm f/5.6

Black-capped Chickadee



Trim branches to be minimal



Black-capped Chickadee

Break branches by hand or with no cuts showing.

Caution: Even a “broken” branch can be seen as a distraction.



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A Clear Subject



White-breasted Nuthatch

The bird should be the clear subject and focus of the photograph.

Yes, Nuthatches climb head first down trees!



Rule of Thirds

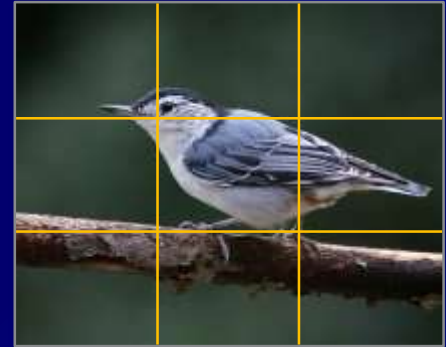
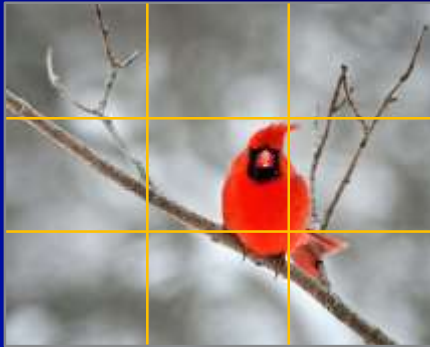
Divide the photo into 9 parts with an imaginary tic tac toe grid



Put points of interest on lines or intersections.



The eye is a point of interest.



Male Northern Cardinal

White-breasted Nuthatch



Get on their level



Tufted Titmouse



Black-capped Chickadee Juvenile Red-shouldered Hawk Purple Swamphen



Magpie Lark



Herring Gull



Galah



Give “Breathing Space”

Get in close, but leave some room around the bird.

More room should be left on the side the bird is heading toward.



White-throated Sparrow



Fill the Frame

Make the subject a significant portion of the photo



Get close! Move in closer or get a bigger lens if possible.

Female Ruby-throated Hummingbird



Or, crop in post-processing.



Eliminate Distractions

Remove items or change position



Remove garbage, camera bags, excess branches etc. or reposition so they aren't in the photo. *Female Ruby-throated Hummingbird*



Or, if not for "Nature," remove in post-processing.



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Eliminate distractions with Post-Processing



Original Photo



1st Crop with
Adjustments



Cropping out distractions
(Ok for "Nature")



Elements removed with
editing

(If not for "Nature")

*Female House
Finch*



Content Aware Fill and Clone Stamping

Can get rid of unwanted items, including garbage, birdseed, etc. (Not for “Nature” though.)



Birdseed on log – Not “Nature”



Birdseed removed – Not
“Nature”

Male Northern Cardinal



Do just enough post processing to bring back the details and colors without over-sharpening



Realistic

Male House Finch



Over-sharpened

Female Northern Cardinal



Don't crop too tight

Leave some space to move into.



You left some room when you took the photo, so don't spoil it in post-processing!

Sulfur-crested Cockatoo



Or, if you're not entering in "Nature," get creative!



Original Photo



Drybrush Effect and Bricks Added

Herring Gull



Creating a Composite: Starting Elements (Doesn't count for "Nature")



Original Photo

Barking Owl



Background Photo



Branch Photo



Creating a Composite:

Giving the bird a more “natural setting”












Original Photo
Barking Owl



Composite Photo



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Practice in your backyard, then go explore the world!



Female Downy Woodpecker, Dark-eyed Junco, Female House Finch, Male House Sparrow, Male House Finch



Think about slower “friendly” birds like ducks, geese and swans as the next step



Female Mallard Duck



Black Swan



Canada goose



Be patient!

Wait for the birds, the light, and the background to come together

Or, find a place where
backgrounds are always
beautiful and birds wait in
trees to be photographed!



Blue-and-yellow Macaw



Persevere!

Don't give up! Keep taking those photographs!
(No matter how many times you get knocked down!)



Sulfur-crested Cockatoos



How to get started photographing birds



Photographing in “the wild”



How to research for birds



Where to find the birds



Conditions and background



What to bring



What to try for



What to do



Using A Bird Blind



Etiquette



Photographing in “the wild”

- Stepping out of your yard
- Unpredictable - you might see something or not...
- Conditions are not always “perfect”
- Public vs Private property



Sanderling



American Bald Eagle



How to research for birds

- Talk to other birders/photographers
- Look for birding events
 - Connecticut Audubon Society
- Research local bird reporting websites
<http://birding.aba.org/mobiledigest/CT01>
- Facebook
 - Birds of the Eastern United States
 - Connecticut Birds
 - Connecticut Audubon/Bird Photos



Herring Gulls



Snowy Owl



Where to find the birds



*Juvenile Yellow-crowned
Night-Heron*

- What is their habitat?
 - Marsh
 - Wooded
 - Field
 - Body of water
- What do they eat?
- Nesting habits
- Migration patterns



Sanderling



Gulls



Conditions and background

Choose a day and time with good light and a good background.



Female House Finch



Black-capped chickadee



Male House Finch



What to bring

- A long lens
- Tripod
- Dress for weather in layers - camouflage
- Water/Snacks
- Cell phone – ringer off
- Camping Stool
- No shiny objects
- Bird Blind
- No flash



Piping Plover



Snowy Owl





Dunlin

What to do

- Move slowly
- Keep low for ground birds
- Find a spot and stay
- Be quiet
- Be patient



Peregrine Falcon



Wood ducks



Using a Bird Blind



What to try for...



Killdeer



Great Egret



Killdeer



Herring Gulls

Action.....



Etiquette

- Be respectful of distance
- Do not disturb nests
- Do not bait
- Leave only footprints



Snowy Egret



Song Sparrow



Immature American Eagle



*Juvenile Yellow-crowned
Night-Heron*



Snowy Owl



Now what?

Seek out, capture and share the beauty around us!



Juvenile Eastern Bluebird



Western Gull and Heermann's Gull



Senegal Parrot



Inspirations



Female Yellow-rumped Warbler



White-breasted Nuthatch



Black-capped chickadee



American Goldfinch



Juvenile Red-shouldered Hawk



Female Ruby-throated Hummingbird



Male Northern Cardinal



Inspirations



Female House Finch



Juvenile Eastern Bluebird



Female Cardinal



American Robin



Herring Gull



Juvenile House Sparrow



Male House Finch



Exhibit: “Pictures and Passages”



www.CCullens.com/WHCC



Exhibit: “Capturing Newtown and Our World”



www.CCullens.com/Newtown



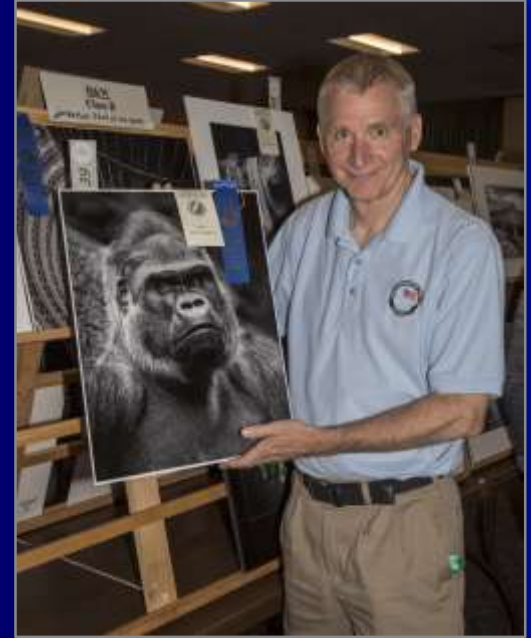
Exhibit: "Capturing Newtown and Our World"



www.CCullens.com/Newtown



NECCC Competition



www.NECCC.org



Thank you!

Presented by:

Rhonda Cullens, *MNEC, NECCC VP*, Cullens Photography
and Sandy Schill, Sandra Lynn Photography



Photo Credits:
Rhonda Cullens
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