

Photographing Birds



Leslie Holzmann

What's your goal?

- Fun?
- Memories?
- ID help?



What's your goal?

- Record birds seen?
- Proof?
- Scientific records?



What's your goal?

- Art?
- The cover of National Geographic?



Get the photo...

but not at the
expense of the bird

The bird comes first

- Keep your distance
- Look for signs of distress
- Avoid repeated flushing
- Avoid disturbing nests!



Care for the habitat

- Some habitats are fragile
 - Riparian
 - Tundra
- Stay on the trail



Some areas prohibit feeding



Getting closer

- Calm & quiet
- Wear neutrals
- Use a blind



Getting closer

- Be a herbivore :
 - Angle in
 - Look down
- Choose popular locations



Technical Stuff

Using your camera

- Know *your* camera
- Read the manual
- Practice everything

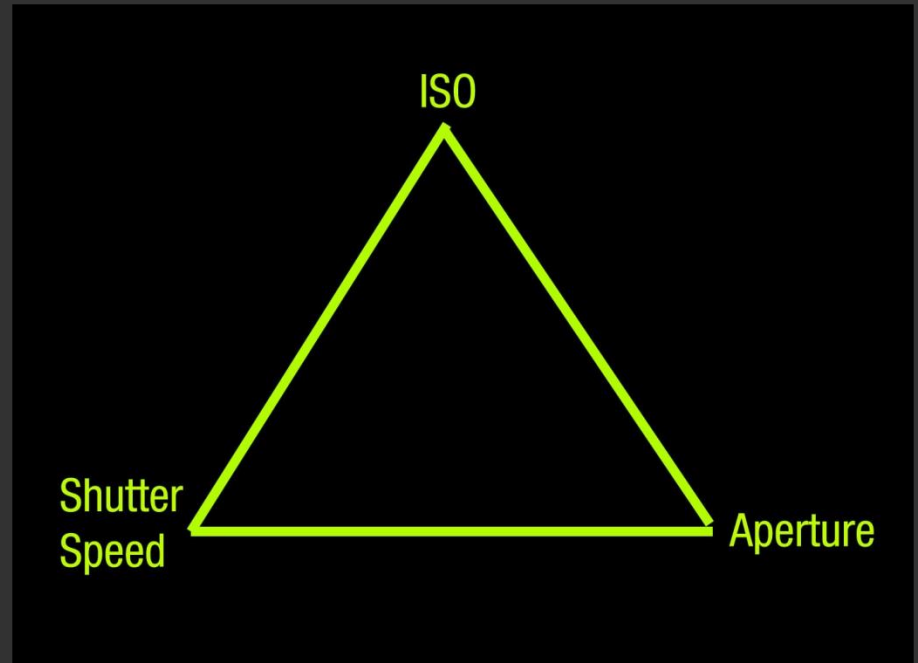


Using your camera

Using your camera

Exposure balances
on 3 legs:

- ISO
- Aperture
- Shutter Speed



Using your camera

Setting your ISO

- Technology improving
- You get what you pay for



Using your camera

Setting your ISO

- **Low number =**
 - More detail / sharper
 - Need brighter light
- **High number =**
 - Grainy / noisy
 - Works with less light



Using your camera

Setting your ISO

- Take test photos
- Use auto ISO:
 - Set to low number
 - Maximum limit

Using your camera

Setting your ISO

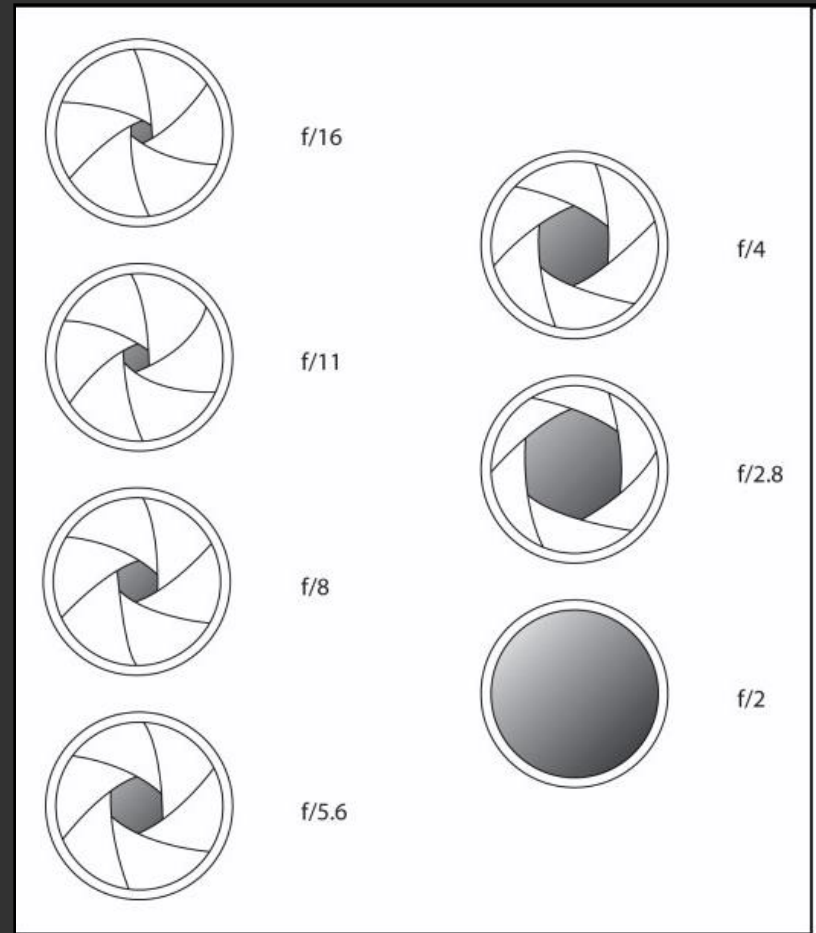
- Post processing



Using your camera

Aperture

- How much light enters the camera
- **f/16** is a small opening
- **f/2.8** is a big opening



Using your camera

Aperture

- Small aperture = wide depth of field
- Big aperture = narrow depth of field



Aperture

- **Wide aperture**
 - Small DOF
 - Focus on 1 gull
- **Small aperture**
 - Wide DOF
 - All gulls in focus

(DOF = Depth of Field)



Aperture

- Lose sharpness with very high f-stops
- f-8 is usually sharpest

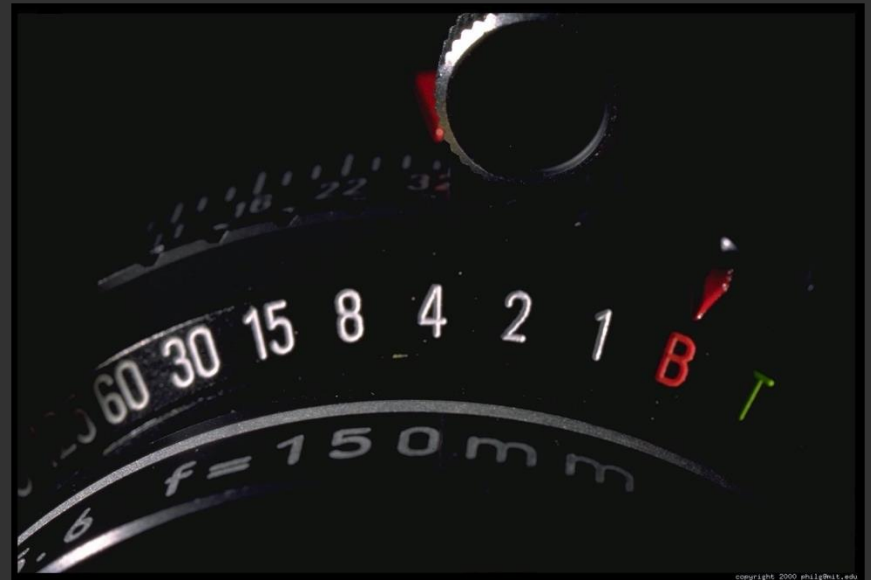


www.cambridgeincolour.com/tutorials/diffraction-photography.htm

Using your camera

Shutter speed

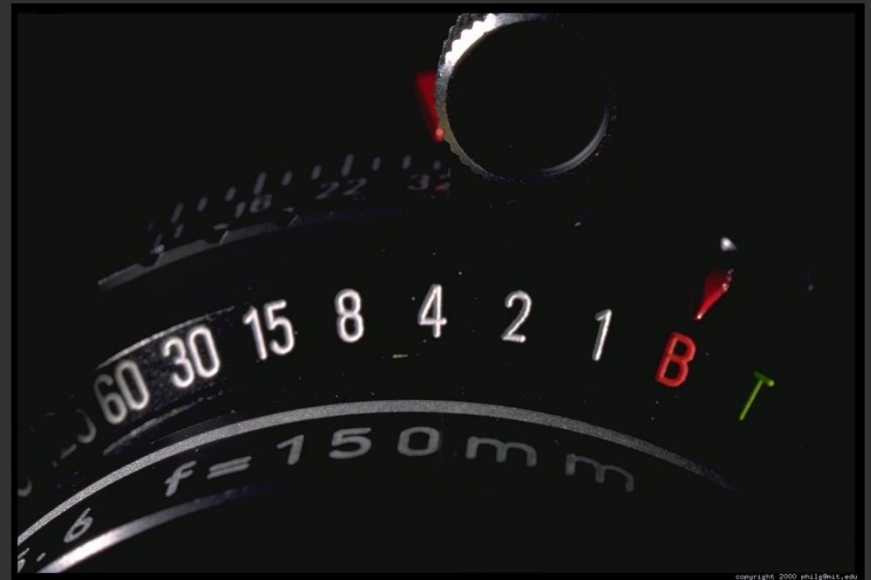
- Bigger numbers = faster shutter
- Low light = low speed
- Brighter light = can use higher speed



Using your camera

Shutter speed

- Low speed = blur
 - Camera shake
 - Subject motion
- Rule of thumb:
 $1/\text{focal length}$



Using your camera

Shutter speed

- Slower speeds blur motion
- Faster speeds freeze motion



Using your camera

Which letter?

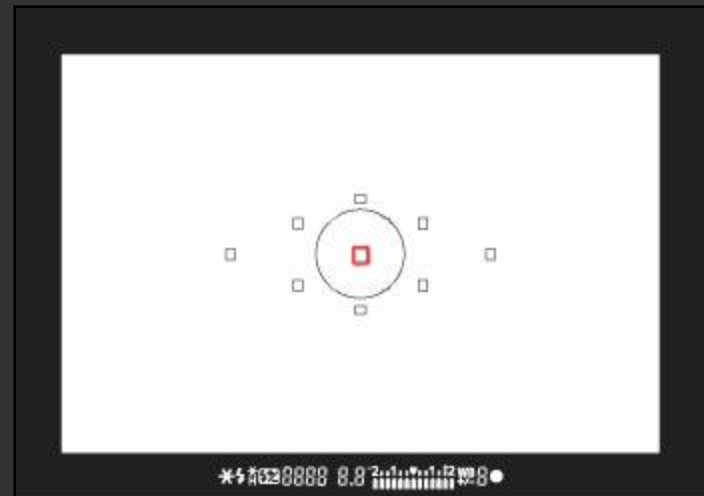
- M = manual
- S or TV = shutter speed priority
- A or AV = aperture priority
- P = program



Using your camera

Focusing

- Manual
- Spot focus
- Scene average
- Continual focus / 3D



Using your camera

Focusing

- A bird in a thicket:
 - Manual focus
 - Focus, move, shoot



American Redstart (female)

Using your camera

Focusing

- **Spot focus**
 - **Default setting**



Golden Whistler, Australia

Using your camera

Focusing



Flying birds:

- Scene average
- “Predictive focus tracking system”
- Continual 3-D focus



Sandhill Cranes, Western Kingbird

Using your camera

Focusing

More than one bird:

- **Spot focus on near bird**
- **Depth of field**



Using your camera

Helpful features

- Fast focusing



Dowitchers

Using your camera

Helpful features

- Continuous shooting (burst)



Using your camera

Helpful features

- Continuous shooting (burst)



What kind of file?

.JPG

- Files are smaller
- Discards information
- Image degrades on resaving
- Usable online



What kind of file?

Shoting RAW

- Files are very large
- Do not degrade on re-saving
- Contain the most information
- Highly editable
- Need compatible software



What kind of file?

Software

- Lightroom
 - Photoshop
 - Photoshop Elements
 - DxO PhotoLab
 - Others
-
- What's your favorite?

Using your camera

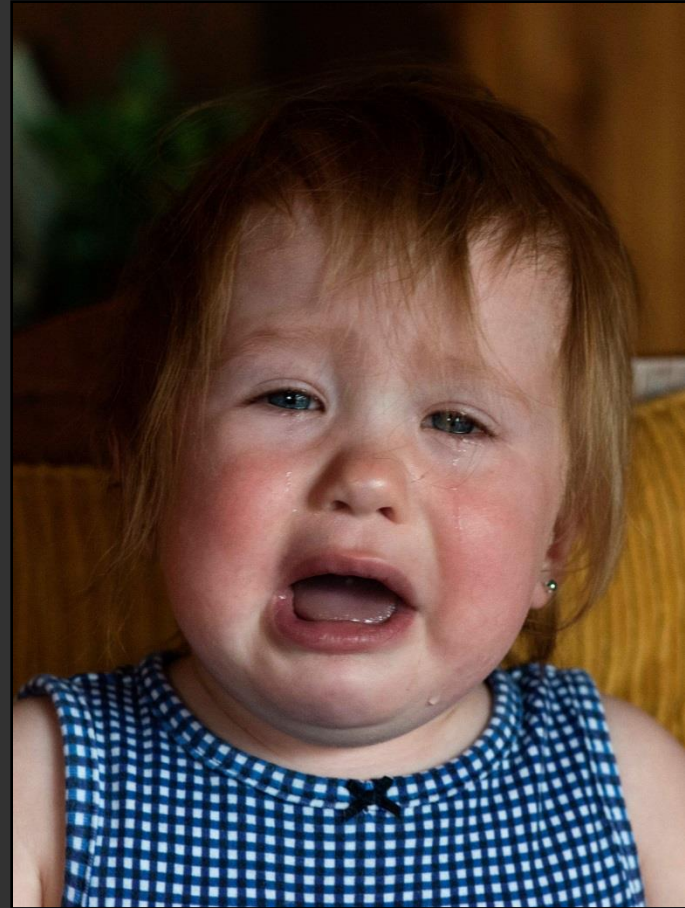
Finding Help

- **DPReview.com**
- **Local camera stores**
- **Photo “magazines” & blogs**
- **Other bird photographers**

What kind of file?

DO YOUR BACKUPS!

- Many options
- Don't trust the hardware!



Lenses

- Lower f-stop is better
- Cheaper lenses may blur at edges
- Wide angle?
- Telephoto!
- Zoom vs. prime
- Tele-converters



Wide angle vs telephoto

- Wide angle lens = wide DOF
- Telephoto lens = narrow DOF



Cell phone cameras

- Pros & cons
- Digiscoping
- Close-up opportunities



Blurring the Background

- Distance to subject
- Aperture
- Focal length
- Sensor size
- Bokeh



Digiscoping

- Uses scope you may already have
- Works for phone cameras to DSLRs
- Good for stationary birds
- Good in low light



Digiscoping

- Scope
- Tripod
- Camera (mirrorless?)
- Adapter
- Remote shutter release



Using your camera

Helpful extra equipment

- Tripod
 - Hold heavy lenses
 - Reduces fuzziness due to camera shake at slow speeds
(but won't hold bird still)
 - Cable release or remote
- Bean Bag



Using your camera

Helpful extra equipment

- Polarizing filter—
reduces glare
- Extra batteries!
- Extra memory
cards!
- Assistant!



Before You Go

- Battery charged?
- Memory card ready?
- Clean lens(es)?
- Check your settings!

Before You Go

- Check your settings!
 - File size & type
 - ISO
 - Mode Focus settings
 - Exposure settings

How to make your
photos look great!

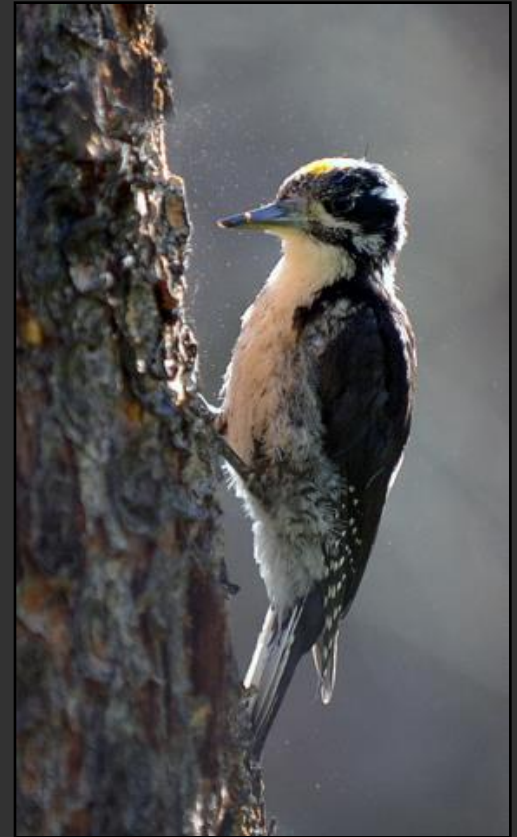
Lighting



Front lighting



Side lighting



Back lighting

Frontlight – sun behind you

- Easy to expose for
- Best to show details
- Best color rendition
- Misses texture



Sidelight – sun to your side

- Great for texture
- Gives 3-D effect



House Finch, Snowy Egrets

Backlight – sun in front of you

- Add one stop to compensate; expose for shadows
- Great for feathers, “halo” effect, dust



Backlight – sun in front of you



East African Gray Crowned Crane, Ferruginous Hawk

Overhead light

- Avoid mid-day
- Harsh, high contrast
- Unattractive
bleached whites and
black shadows



Cloudy-bright

- Best lighting?
- Soft shadows
- Saturates colors
- Rare in Colorado



Canyon Wren, Yellow-faced Honey-eater

Cloudy-bright

- Best lighting
- Soft shadows
- Saturates colors
- Rare in Colorado



The “Magic Hour”

- 1 hour after sunrise
- 1 hour before sunset
- Warm light



The “Magic Hour”

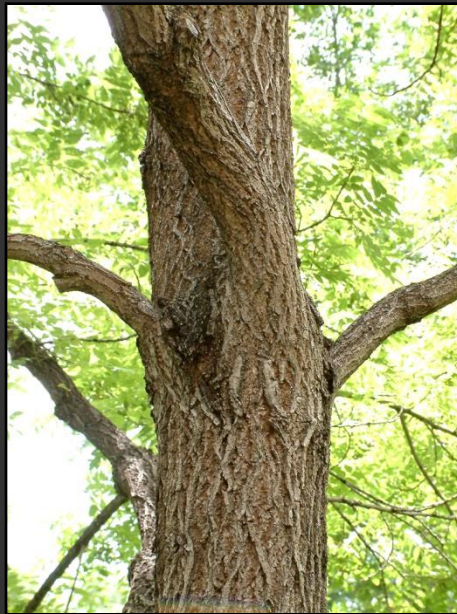
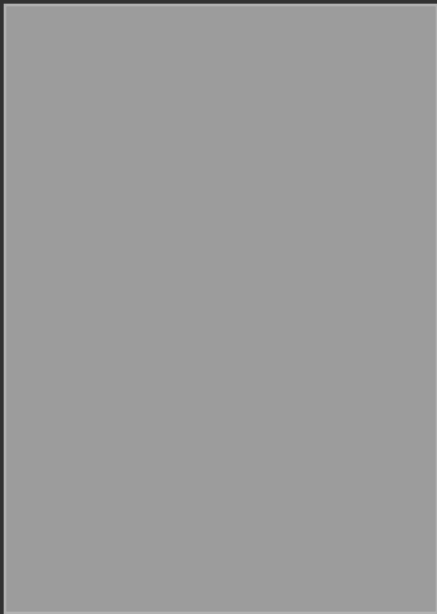


Taken five minutes apart!

Using your camera

Exposure: 18% gray

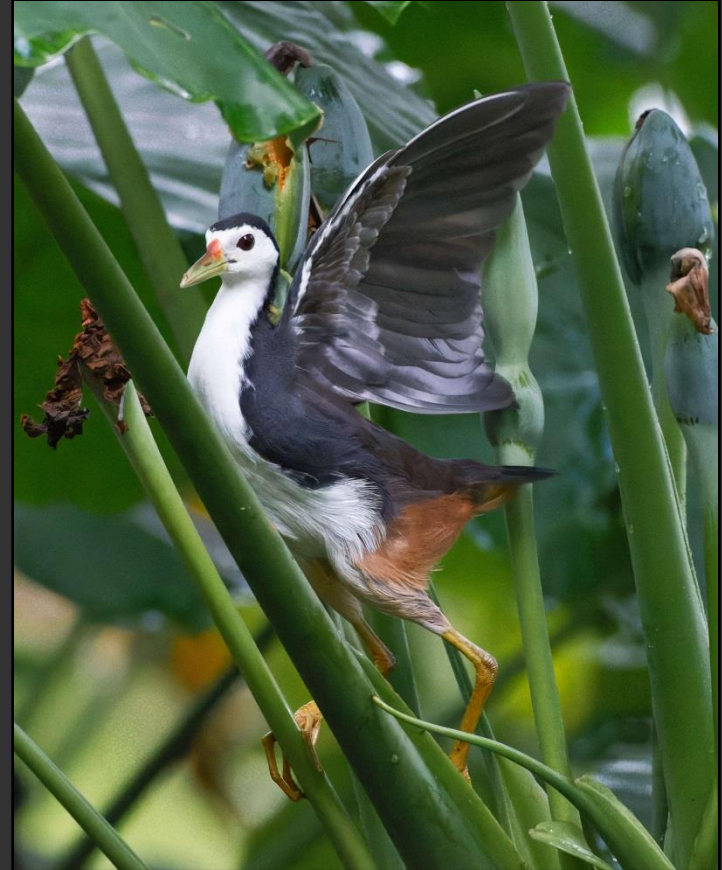
- Average foliage
- Dry tree trunks
- Gray cards



Using your camera

Exposure: 18% gray

- Birds on grass
- Birds against dense foliage



Using your camera

Exposure override

- When the camera's meter is wrong
- Button, dial, menu?
- Remember to reset it!



Using your camera

Black birds

- Camera aims for 18% gray
- Which way do you compensate?



Using your camera

White birds

- Camera aims for 18% gray
- Which way do you compensate?



Using your camera

Birds against the sky

- Camera will expose for sky
- Which way do you compensate?



Using your camera

Birds against dark water

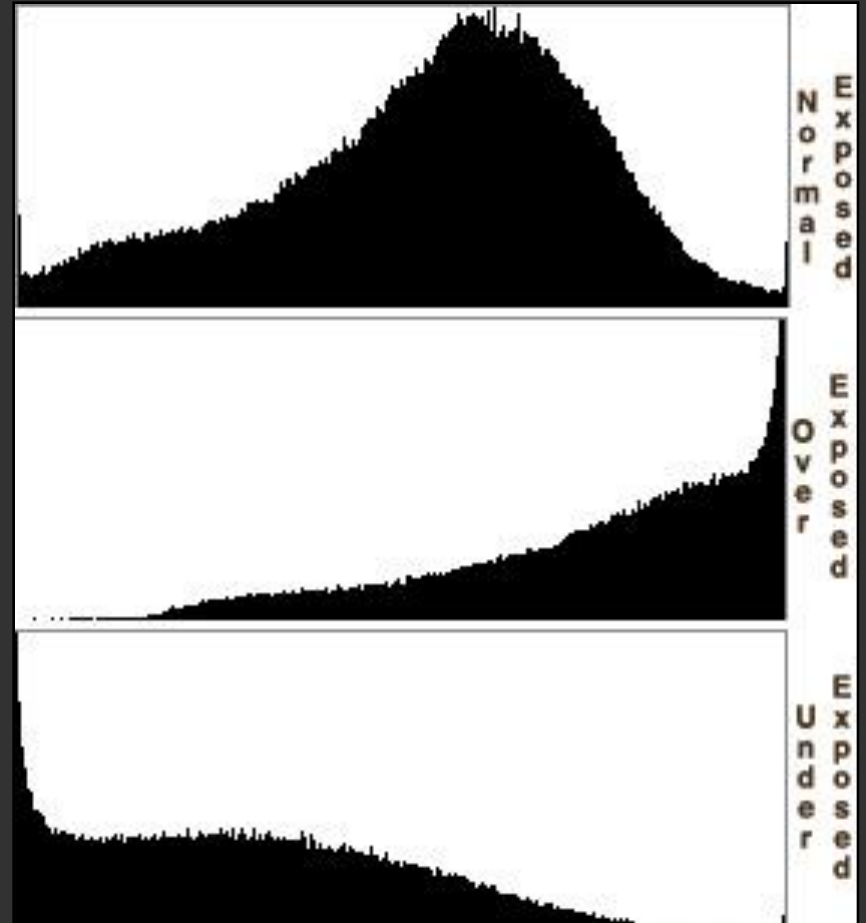
- Camera will expose for water
- Which way do you compensate?



Using your camera

Histograms

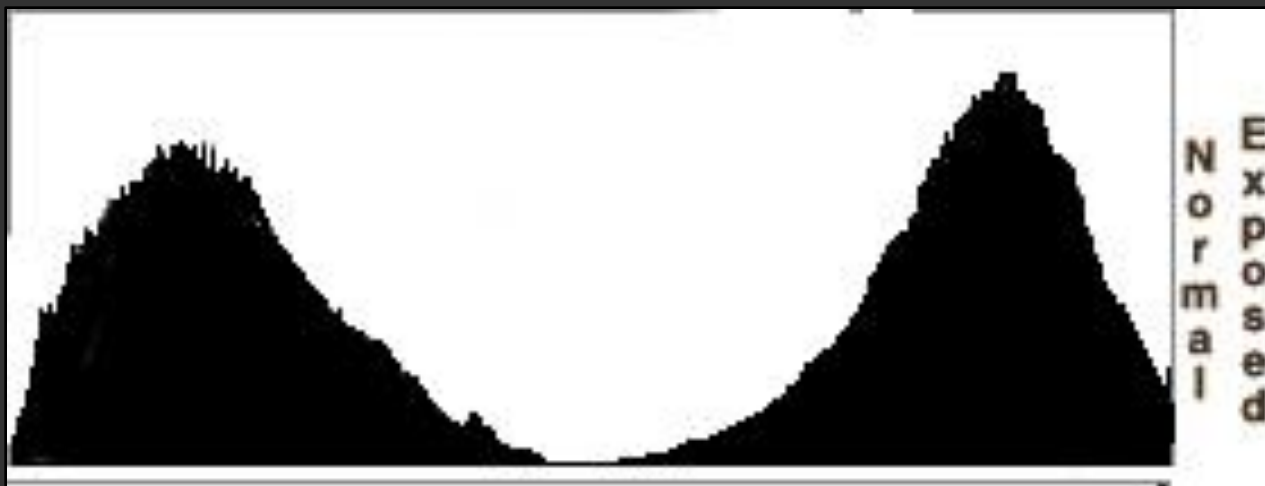
- Show exposure
- 256 shades of gray
- Should fit on chart
- Light to right
- Dark to left



Using your camera

Histograms

- What might be in this photo?



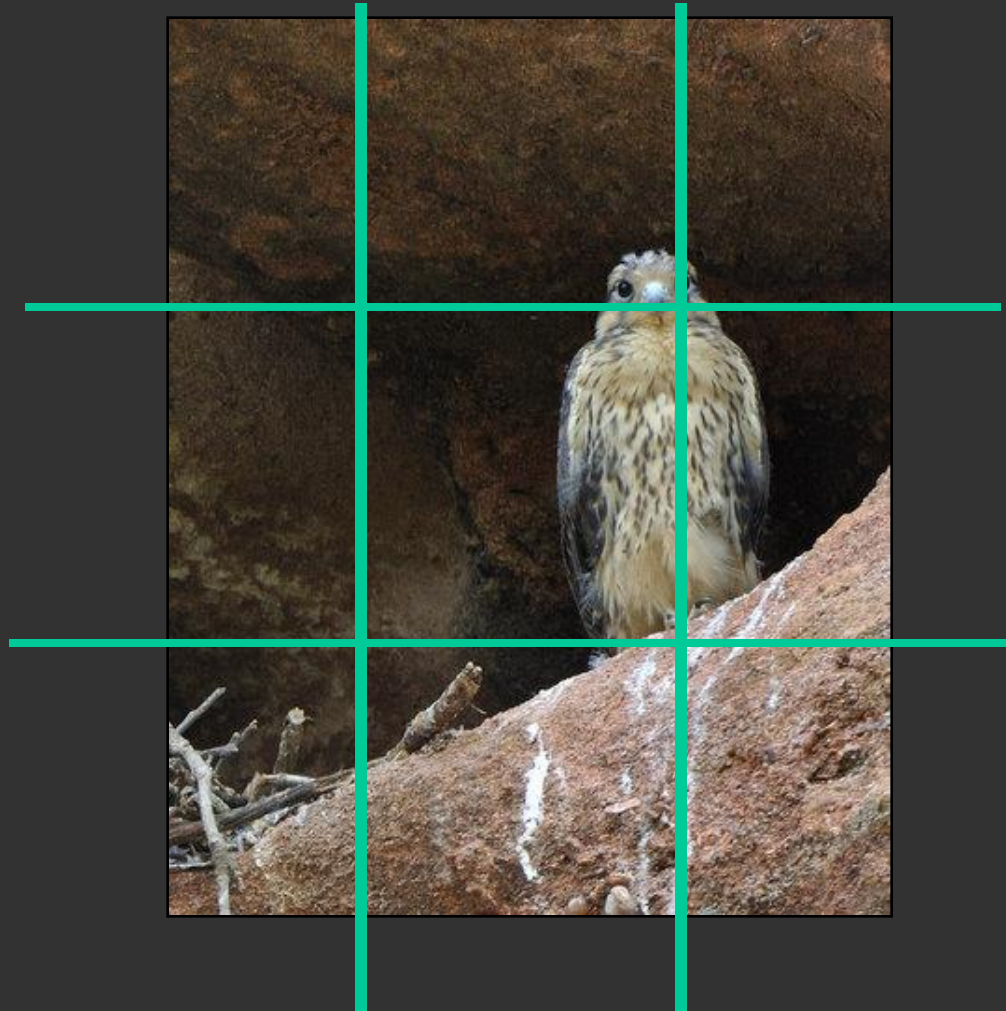
Be an artist!

The “Rule of Thirds”



Juvenile Prairie Falcon

The “Rule of Thirds”



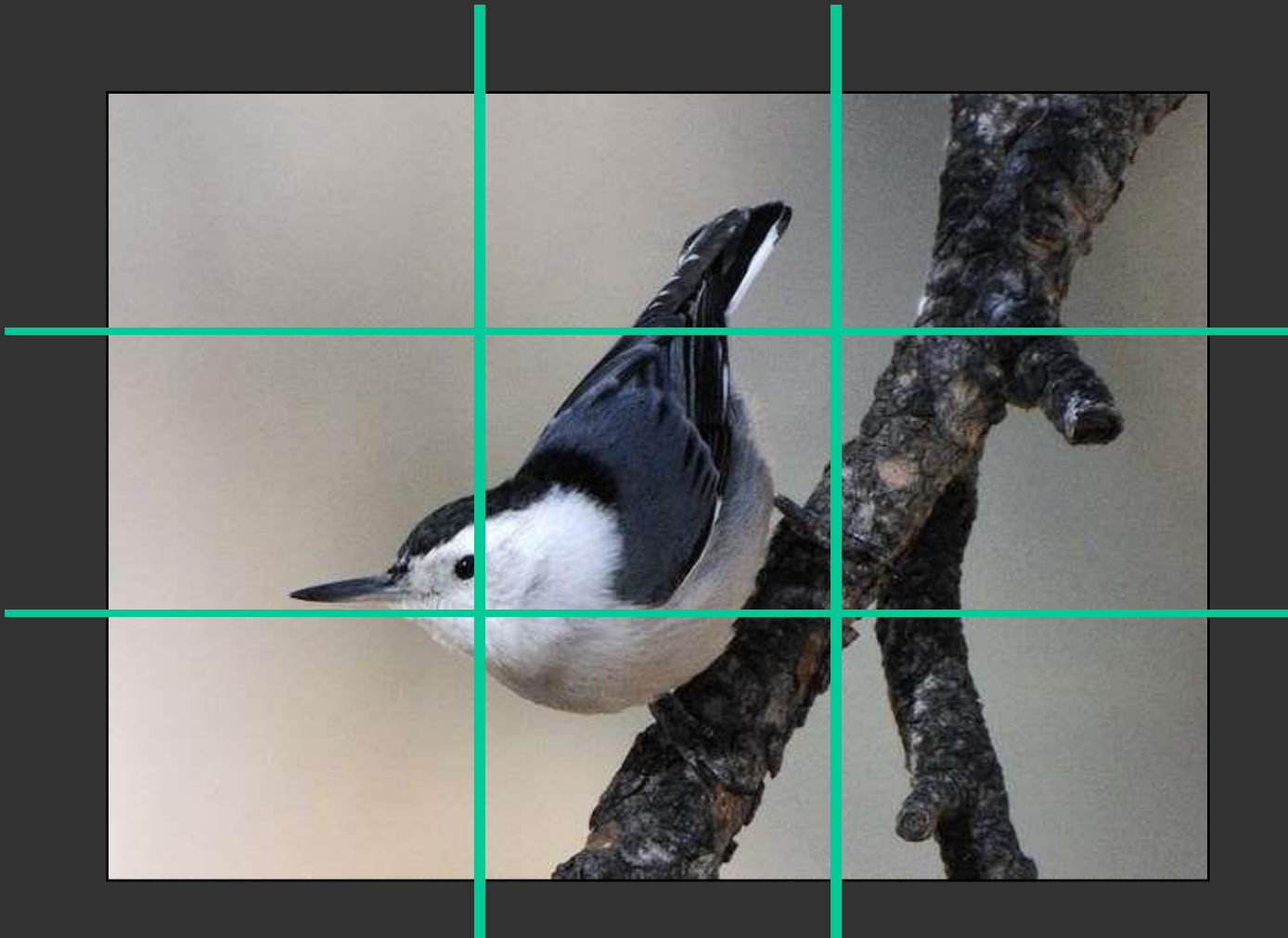
Juvenile Prairie Falcon

The “Rule of Thirds”



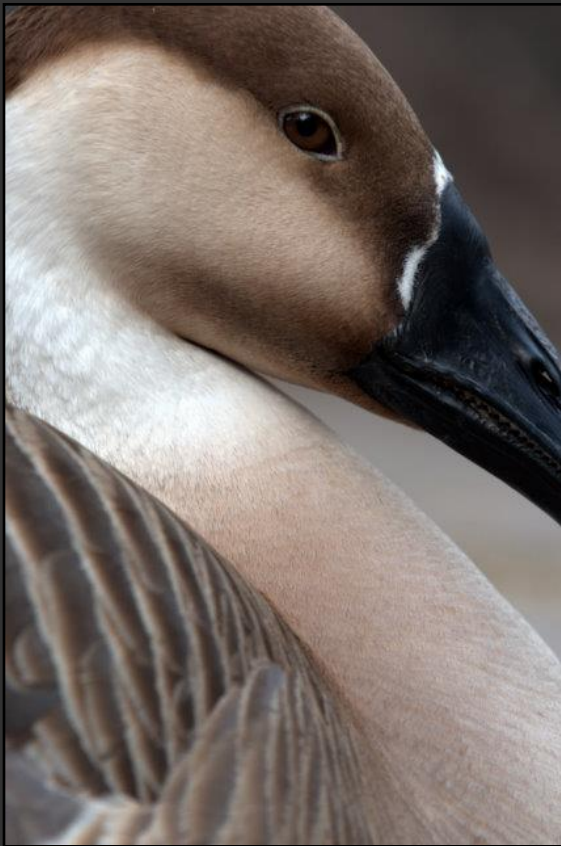
White-breasted Nuthatch

The “Rule of Thirds”



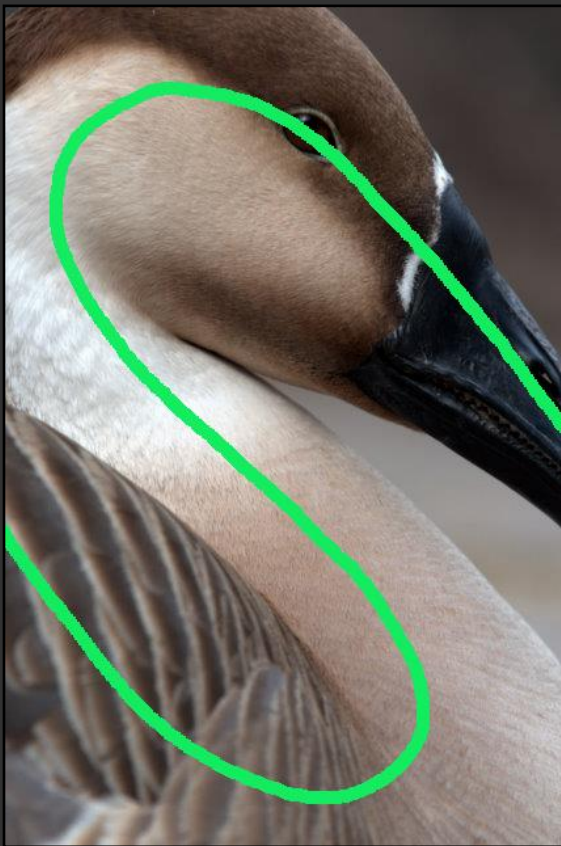
White-breasted Nuthatch

Line



Swan Goose, Black-necked Stilt

Line



Swan Goose, Black-necked Stilt

Framing



Steller's Jay, Yellow-rumped Warbler

Check your edges ...



Zoom in (or crop)



Semipalmated Sandpipers

Watch for shadows ...



Song Sparrow, American Flamingo

Eliminate bright spots



Steller's Jay

Color



Eastern Rosella Parrot, Western Tanager

Black & white



Kori Bustard, Wood Stork

Texture



Kookaburra, Pelican sp. (San Diego Wild Animal Park)

Pattern



American Avocets

Pattern



Australian Pelicans

Using your camera

Focus on the eyes



Sanderling

Catch the “catch light”



Black-capped Chickadee

One bird? Or the whole scene?



Northern Pintail

One bird? Or the whole scene?



Put them in context



Cedar Waxwing, Rufous Hummingbird

Put them in context

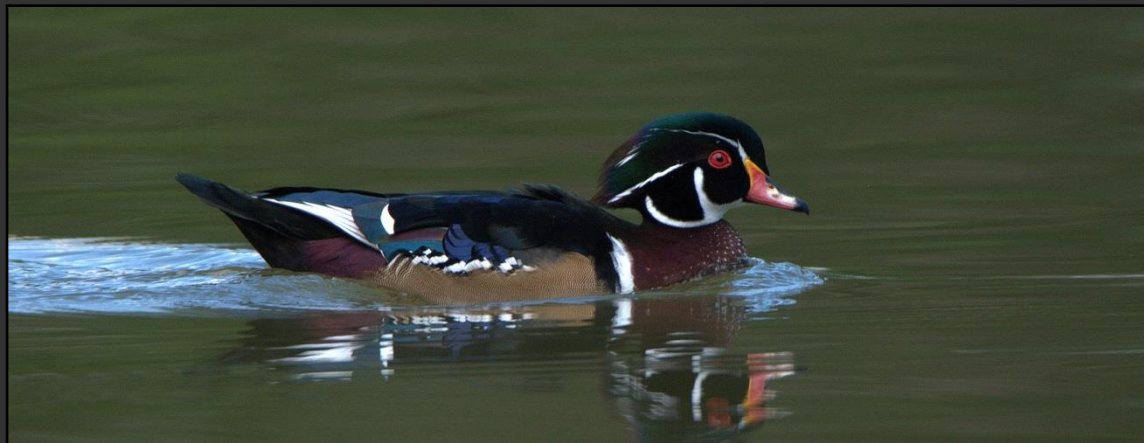


Gilded Flicker, Song Sparrow

All of the bird? Or part?



Leave room to move



White-fronted Geese, Wood Duck

Look 'em in the eyes!



Keep it simple



Common Grackle, Wood Ducks

Isolate the subject



Mexican Jay, Western Gull

Eliminate background clutter



Eliminate distracting elements



Gray Kingbird

Eliminate distracting elements



Gray Kingbird

Eliminate distracting elements



Gray Kingbird

Use a neutral background



Belted Kingfisher, Mallard

Dark on light vs. light on dark



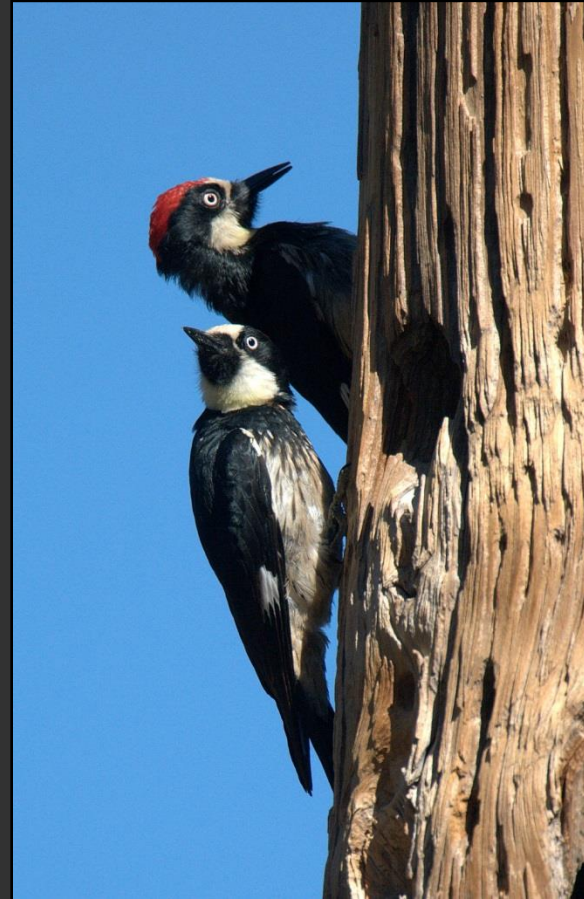
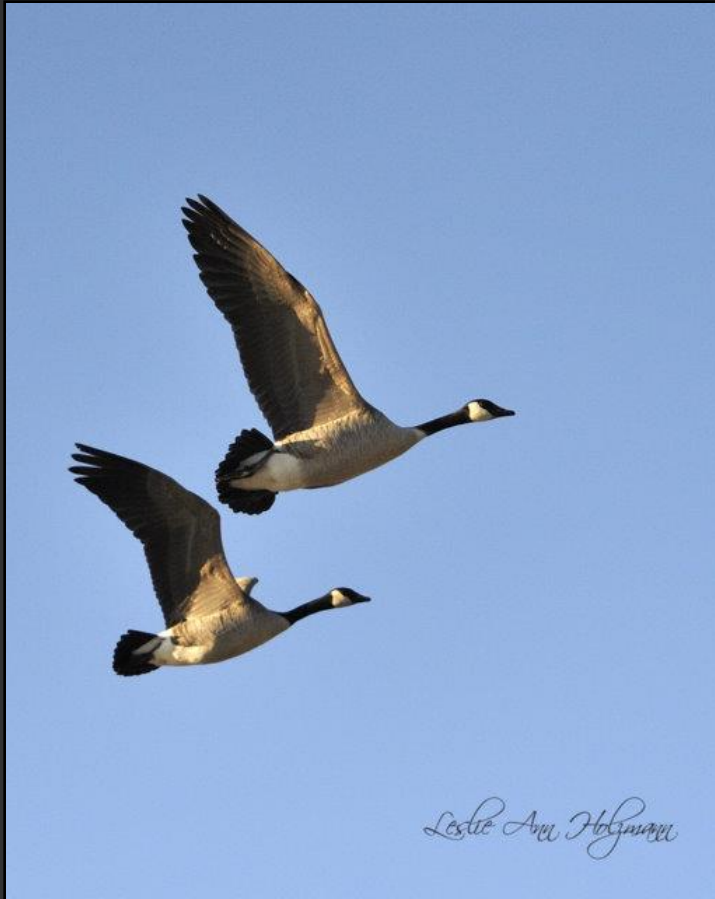
Black-necked Stilt, Rufous Hummingbird

Eliminate unnecessary content



House Finch

Include more than one



Canada Geese, Acorn Woodpeckers

Three is pleasing



Black-bellied Whistling Ducks

Three is pleasing



Long-billed Curlews

Use your knowledge of birds

Anticipate the action

- Use your birding skills
- Observe first
- Pre-focus & wait



Anticipate the action

- **When about to fly:**
 - Take off into the wind
 - Lighten the load



Capture bird behavior



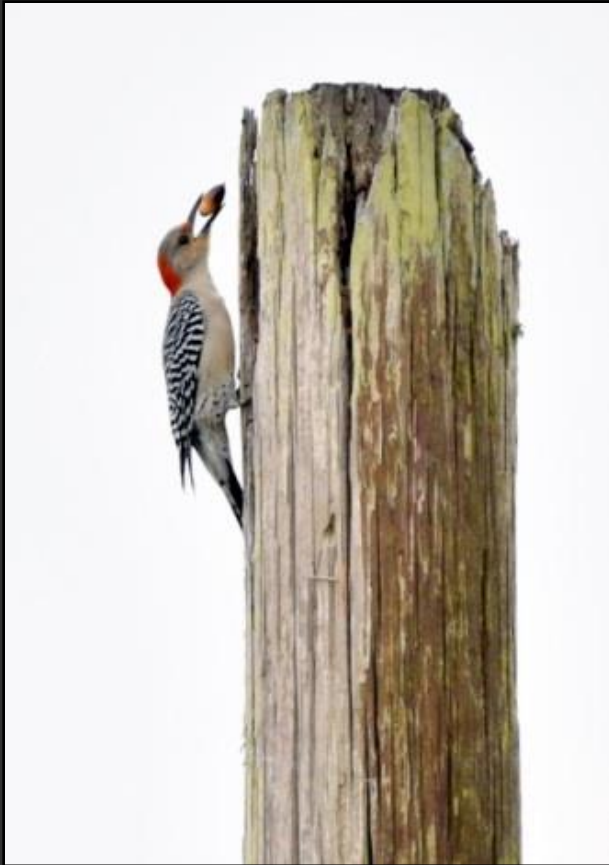
Capture bird behavior

- Flying
- Hunting
- Eating



Tricolored Heron hunting

Capture bird behavior



Red-bellied Woodpecker, Ring-billed Gull

Capture bird behavior

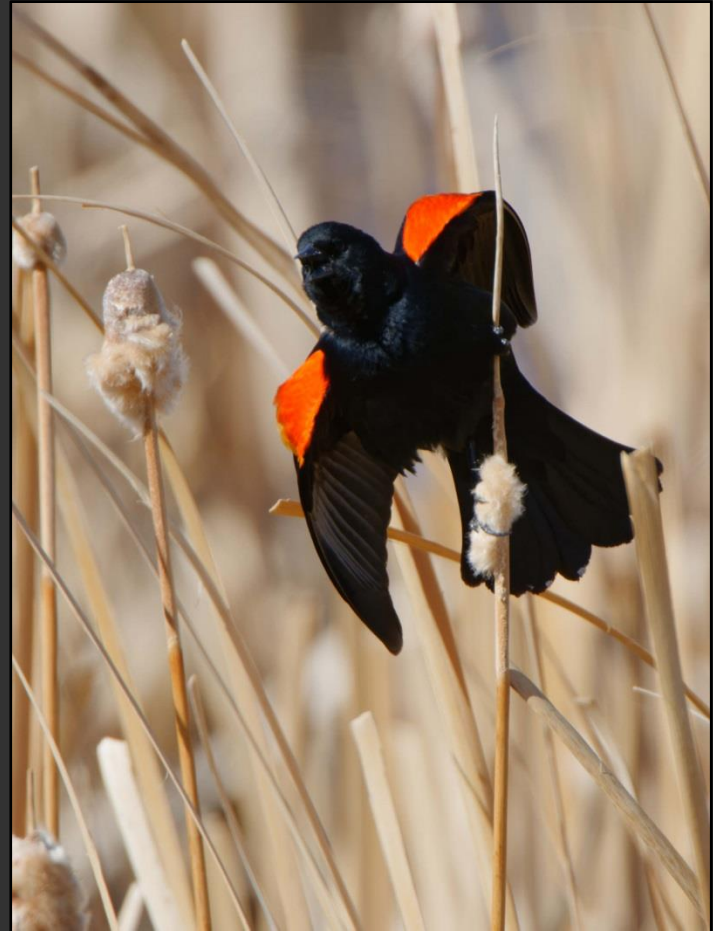
- Bathing



Golden-crowned Sparrow

Capture bird behavior

- Singing
- Displaying



Red-winged Blackbird

Capture bird behavior



Ring-billed Gull, Western Meadowlark

Capture bird behavior

- Mating
- Nesting
- Raising young



White-winged Dove

Capture bird behavior



Purple Martins, Black-necked Stilts

Capture bird behavior



American Coots, Royal Terns

Capture the defining moment



Capture the defining moment



Red-shouldered Hawk, Yellow-headed Blackbird

Make it fun



Western Gull, Black-bellied Whistling Duck

Show their personalities



Eared Grebe, Variegated Fairy-wren

Make us marvel!



Variegated Fairy-wren, Green Bee-eater,
Diamond Firetail, Eastern Spinebill

Make us smile!



Black-and-white Warbler, Comb-crested Jacana

Make us smile!



White Ibis, Verdin

You can do it!

- Break the rules
- Be creative
- Have fun



Questions?



Questions?

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- Call/text: (719) 964-3197
- Blog.Mountain-Plover.com

Resources tab
PW: "PPB&NF"

