

SUMMER BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY

Photographer Kaleel Zibe shares his expert secrets to help you get the best possible shots



Arctic Terns

The hardest thing about wildlife photography is finding the wildlife in the first place. When you've found it, can you get close enough without disturbing it? Will it stay where you want it? Fieldcraft starts with knowledge: researching a species and location in as much detail as possible.

Years ago, when I first tried to photograph Kingfishers in summer, I went to a spot where the birds had been reported. I waited. And waited. After about two hours, an electric blue speck zipped past me. An hour later, it did exactly the same thing in the opposite direction. I didn't take a single shot.

This was a salutary lesson for me and I vowed to do my research next time. I discovered, to my surprise, that most good Kingfisher shots were obtained by placing a submerged tank of fish for the birds to dive into from a strategically placed perch. There are potential ethical problems with this: live bait issues and possible wing damage from collisions with the sides of the tank. However, what this taught me was that it's often necessary to try to control the environment and bring the subjects to your camera, rather than the other way around. Food, or interesting things to perch on, can put the bird where you want and increase your chances of getting great shots.

Some time after my first Kingfisher foray, I got a tip-off from a friend that a Kingfisher was regularly perching in front of a hide at one of our local reserves. Bingo! There it was, fishing for Sticklebacks and looking kingly. All I had to do was turn up. It's all very well knowing every aspect of technique, but if the



Redstart

birds aren't there, you might as well sit at home and take pictures of the dog.

Hides and camouflage clothing come in many shapes, colours and forms, but they all aim to either conceal you or break up your outline so that you're not a threat. I often find it surprising that the birds and animals around me are aware I'm there, but don't perceive me as a threat. It's often more important to simply not be shaped like a human or behave in a threatening manner. Sitting very still, with your back to a tree in camouflage or drab clothing works surprisingly well. When you're in a fixed wooden hide, chances are the wildlife has got used to it being there and will forgive some sudden movements and noises, but with a portable hide, you may have to put it in for

several days before it's accepted.

Approaching birds is very much about how happy they are with your presence. If you're sitting waiting for them, that's a different story, but moving forward towards a bird will trigger a flight response once you get too close. 'Too close' depends on the species, how habituated to humans it is and a whole host of other factors. Take it very, very slowly. You're likely to be most accepted if you wait for the bird to come to you rather than the other way round, which might mean sitting around for a while...

The technical bit...

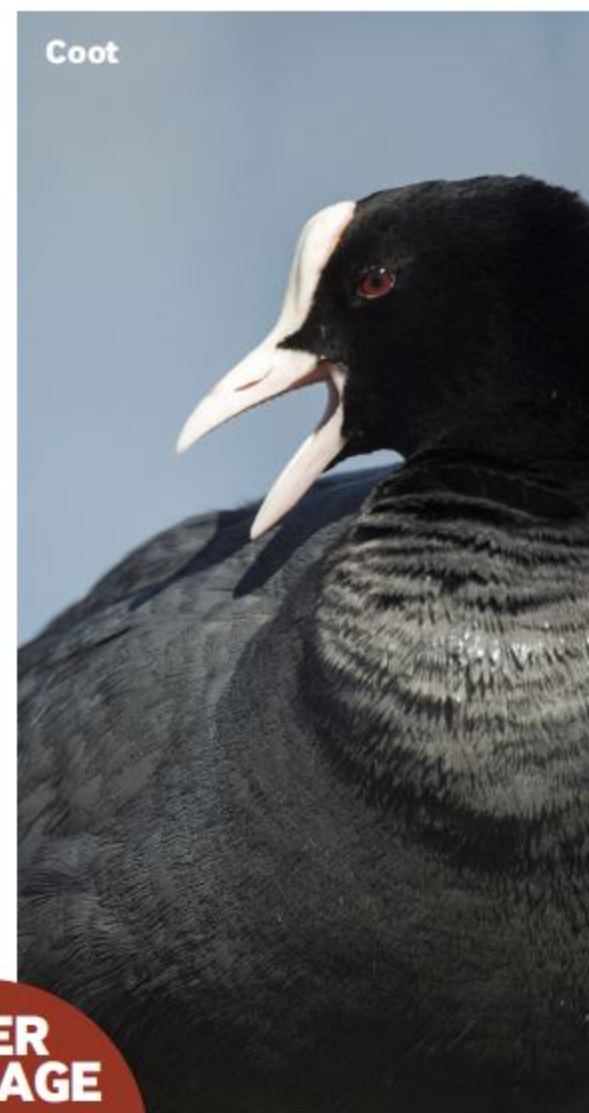
Light in summer is usually in much greater supply than in winter. However, summer light is often a lot harsher than at other times

About Kaleel Zibe

Kaleel is a professional photographer and photography writer. He also runs wildlife photography workshops and safaris with Alan Hewitt and Trai Anfield at Hawk's Head Photography Workshops.



Reed Warbler



Coot

OVER THE PAGE
WIN a place on Kaleel's photo course



Shag



Robin

of year because the sun's position is much higher in the sky.

It's important to realise that you'll need to compensate for the fact that the digital sensor cannot record everything you see. In bright conditions, you'll have to make a decision about what is important to record correctly in the scene: the lights or the darks. An example of this would be taking a flight shot of a bird with a bright sky behind. Usually what happens is that the camera assesses the scene and drags the exposure down to compensate for the bright sky, thus leaving the bird dull and underexposed. To expose correctly for the bird, you'll have to add exposure compensation. There will be a button or dial on your camera to add or subtract exposure. However, having added

exposure to the image, the camera is unlikely to record much or any tonal detail in the sky. The bird will be correctly exposed but the sky will be overexposed to white.

There are a few things you can do to minimise this tonal range compromise: firstly try photographing at the beginning or end of the day when the light is less harsh. Avoid shooting against a bright sky. Don't dismiss cloudy summer days: the dynamic range is reduced in overcast, diffuse conditions. Use the camera's RAW mode and Adobe RGB colour space as these options record most information and allow the greatest leeway when editing later on the computer. Lastly, if you're close enough, you can add a burst of flash to lift deep shadows to within range of your sensor. **EW**

What do I need?

My advice would be to firstly pay good money for a quality lens and then on a camera body – in that order. High quality glass affects how sharp, bright and clean the image is and makes it easier for the camera to focus. This money is well invested, as the lens will likely last beyond the useful life of your digital camera.

The longer the lens, the more apparent camera shake will be. A good tripod and head will help to avoid this. A great option is a sturdy tripod with a gimbal head, which allows you to fluidly swing the lens around. Lens image stabilisation is very useful for cutting down shake and a remote shutter release will avoid wobbling the setup.



Hawk's Head Photography has teamed up with WWT Caerlaverock to offer a superb residential wildlife photography workshop – Photography, Birds & Cask Ale!

Based at the famous reserve on the Scottish shores of the Solway Firth, Dumfriesshire, you'll enjoy a weekend photographing Whooper Swans, Red Kites and other wildlife, with expert photo tuition and birding guides, evenings of great food and cask ale and whisky tasting, and good company and transport in a chartered minibus. Friday and Saturday night accommodation is in the superbly equipped WWT Caerlaverock Farmhouse. The workshop is ideal for wildlife photographers of all abilities.

THE PRIZE

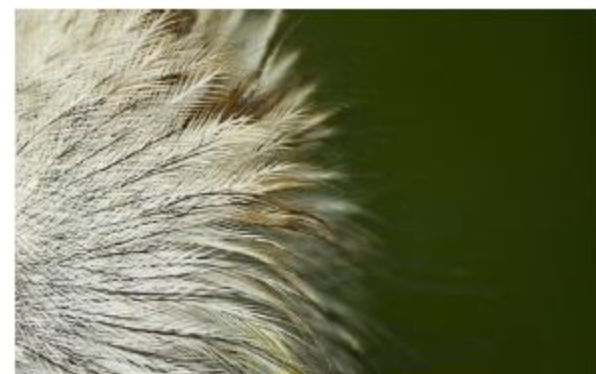
We have one place on the workshop to be won. As well as enjoying a great weekend (15-17 November, 2013) of expert photography tuition, great food and real ale, and good company, you'll have a chance to see your photos featured in *Bird Watching*, and to tell readers about your experience.

To be in with a chance of winning, all you have to do is tell us what British species is pictured on the right:

- A Pheasant**
- B Tawny Owl**
- C Buzzard**

To enter, go to greatcompetitions.co.uk/bw or send your answer on a postcard, with

your name, address, and a contact phone number, to Caerlaverock Competition, ResponsAbility, PO Box 57, Coates, Peterborough PE7 2FF. The closing date is 31 August 2013



Itinerary

The weekend starts on Friday at 6pm with a drinks reception and introductions in the WWT Caerlaverock visitor centre. There's a detailed run through the timetable, and an evening buffet. Throughout the evening you'll enjoy a few beers, wine and a malt whisky tasting session, before breaking into small teams for a suitably themed quiz.

Throughout Saturday morning you'll photograph the superb Whooper Swans, which come to Caerlaverock in their hundreds from the Arctic Circle. You'll look at techniques to capture these beautiful birds in flight, and as they engage in

courtship and feeding. The Sir Peter Scott hide has two levels: ground level is great for intimate portraiture and the upper level provides a super vantage point for flight photography. Kaleel Zibe from Hawk's Head will be present to offer guidance, and Dave Fairlamb of the WWT will be on hand to talk about the wildlife.

After lunch, you'll head to a Red Kite feeding station – there you'll photograph a sight you'll never forget; up to 100, sometimes more, Red Kites.

At around 7pm you'll head to the Cavens Arms in Dumfries, an outstanding pub with a superb history of CAMRA pub

of the year awards. Dave, who is not only an expert birder but a master of real ale tasting, will guide you through a selection of three very different cask ales, and you'll enjoy an evening meal as you continue to explore the range of ales.

On Sunday morning, you'll travel to some of the habitats surrounding the reserve, to look at some of the migratory species which settle in this part of Scotland, and Dave will impart his knowledge of fieldcraft, describing how you can read the behaviour of birds and identify them through sound as well as visually.

What's included in your prize?

- Two nights accommodation in the Farmhouse
- Car parking
- Photography guidance and tuition
- Friday evening buffet and whisky tasters
- Saturday lunch at the reserve cafe
- Sunday packed lunch
- Red Kite feeding
- Saturday evening meal and real ale tasting
- Transport between all activities and locations
- Wildlife fieldcraft guidance and tuition

■ For further information on Hawk's Head Photography's full range of workshops and safaris, go to: www.hawksheadphotography.com