

Nature Photography Articles by Andrew Goodall

Five Easy Low Tech Tips

Digital cameras have so many features and functions, they can make photography seem too confusing for the beginner. Many new photographers, intimidated by an overly complex manual, switch their digital camera to auto, and never learn how to use them properly.

If this sounds like you, keep reading, because I have good news. There are some great ways to take better photos without having to learn the complexities of your camera. That's right – leave your camera on auto and still learn to take great photos.

Of course I encourage anybody to learn and understand aperture and shutter speed, the settings you will need to understand to really improve as a photographer. However, the best encouragement is to start getting results quickly, so here are five easy tips to help you improve your photography...the low-tech way! Note that my profession is nature photography, but these tips can help you with all kinds of subjects.

Take your photo in the best possible light

You may have heard that the best light for most photography is very early or very late in the day, when the sun is low, and the light is soft and colourful. This is a good rule to follow most of the time. Not only is the light more attractive, you can also avoid the contrast and heavy shadows that usually spoil your photos in the middle of the day.

Some subjects actually work better on cloudy days. For animals and people, cloudy weather softens the light and overcomes the problem of your subject squinting into the light. In the forest, overcast skies prevent the heavy contrast that is a problem on sunny days.

Landscape photos: create a more interesting composition

Many photos can be made more interesting not by zooming right in on the subject, but by zooming out, or standing further back to capture more of the surroundings. The important thing is to use make sure you use the surroundings to add impact to the picture.

For example, let's say you are photographing an old rustic farmhouse. You could add even more character by using a line of fence posts, or a gravel driveway, to lead the eye into the picture. Or when photographing a waterfall, you could try going a little further downstream, to shoot the creek with the waterfall in the background for a more interesting angle.

Sunset and sunrise

Everyone loves taking sunset (and sunrise) photos. A brilliant sunset sky can make a great photo, but you can make it even better by looking for a good subject in the foreground. The key is to find something that stands out against the sky, with a shape that people can identify; a tree, a windmill, even a row of power-lines. The subject does not have to dominate the photo; in fact it is probably best if it only takes up about ten percent of the composition so that the sky remains the starring attraction. But if you can create a striking silhouette, you will immediately add character to your sunset photograph.

Animals and people

Portrait style photos, where the animal or human subject dominates a large part of the picture, are usually spoiled by a distracting background. When you take a photo of a friend, a pet, or an animal in the wild, you don't want the picture to be full of the people and objects around them.

So here's the trick. Don't stand close to your subject and take the photo with a regular or wide-angle lens. Stand further back and zoom in with your largest lens magnification. This will have two results. First, it will reduce the area behind and around the subject that is visible in the photo. Second, it will minimize the depth of field, which means only your subject should be in focus. Anything in front or behind will be out of focus, and will not cause a distraction in the photo.

Concentrate

Sometimes all it takes to make a photo a success is to move a little to the left or right, or zoom in or out just a little more. If you just point the camera in the right general direction and click, you are bound to fail most of the time. If you slow down and really examine what you can see in the viewfinder before you press the button, your success rate will improve.

Simple things to look out for include; trees and power-poles appearing to grow out of the head of the subject (move yourself or the subject to a better position); litter on the ground (pick it up); aircraft or distracting clouds in the sky (wait for them to pass by); blurry branches on a windy day (wait for conditions to settle for a moment). All these things and more can ruin a photo, and they can all be remedied by taking a good look to make sure your picture has captured everything you want, and nothing you don't want.

So there you have some easy tips for good photography without getting hung up on technology. Above all, pay attention to tip #5 and slow down to concentrate on what you are doing. The other golden rule is to take lots of photos. Experience will teach you a lot more than being told what to do. Remember with digital cameras it doesn't cost you anything to keep on snapping. With patience and attention to detail, you will be taking better photos in no time – guaranteed!

How Many Megapixels Do You Need?

Is 'megapixel' the most overused word in the language of digital photography?

Tell anyone you are thinking of buying a new digital camera, and the first question they will probably ask you is "How many megapixels does it have?" In my gallery I often overhear comments like "I would love to take better photos, but my camera doesn't have enough megapixels."

Like computers and the internet, digital photography has bred two types of 'expert.' There are people who know a lot. Then there are the people who know just a little, but think they know everything. Many of these people have been persuaded (most likely by a salesman trying to increase his commission) that the key to good photography is a high megapixel rating. By clinging to this notion, they may well be ignoring more important factors that could help them become better photographers.

The number of pixels in a photo determines how much you can enlarge the picture without losing image quality. The more megapixels, the bigger the print. But how important is this really, for most photographers in today's digital world?

Let's forget about the size of the enlargement for a moment. How many photos these days are ever printed at all, let alone enlarged to poster size? Gone are the days of shooting photos on negative film, and printing them to see the results. These days we see the results immediately in the camera, and can look at them in better detail on the computer screen. In fact, by eliminating the cost of film and developing, more people are taking more photos than ever before.

But back to the question: how many of these photos ever get printed? Most pictures live their lives on a computer screen, where we see a small version of a photo at 72dpi. In fact, if we want to share them in emails or add them to web pages, we have to make them even smaller to travel in cyberspace.

Of course there are people who print a lot of their photos. I encourage everybody to print their best photos, frame them, hang them, and give them as gifts...after all, what is the purpose of all these photos if we don't do something with them? But do we need a lot of megapixels to create a good print?

In most cases, the answer is no. The vast majority of printed photos are 6x4 or 5x7 inches, and very occasionally 8x12 inches. Very few non-professional photographers will ever print a very big enlargement from their own photography. They might think they will; but almost certainly, they won't.

So, do we really need all these megapixels? I equate it to buying a car that can travel 200 kilometres per hour in a country where the speed limit is 100. The power is there, and it may give some inward pride to know it is there...but it is wasted power all the same. Apart from bragging rights, in some ways you are equally well served by an old hatchback that just gets you from Point A to Point B.

You can produce good, high quality prints up to 8x12 inch (20x30cm), and probably larger, with a five megapixel camera. This is not a compromise; I doubt you would see any improvement in print quality taking the same picture on a ten megapixel camera.

Certainly you would see a difference if you enlarged the photo to poster size, but (as we have discussed), very few people reading this article are likely to do that.

Please do not see these comments as negative. I would never suggest that anyone who has bought a more powerful camera has wasted their money. Your upmarket camera probably came with an extra feature or two that adds to the fun you can have with photography. And of course, it is nice to know you could make giant prints from your photos...even though we both know you possibly never will.

Rather, I want to encourage all those people who didn't buy the top-of-the-range camera and wish they did, or are currently agonizing over how much to spend on their next camera. If you want a camera that takes a decent photo, for use online or to produce small and medium sized prints, you don't need to overextend your budget. Buy the camera you can reasonably afford and be happy with it – it will do the job for you.

If there is one important buying tip that is more important than the megapixels, it is to find a camera with a good quality lens. If your photos are not crystal clear and sharp when they are small, they are not going to improve by being blown up to larger sizes. In fact, all you would be doing is making your fuzzy image bigger and fuzzier.

Just as importantly, once you have your camera, learn to use it. Most digital cameras come with manual settings that allow you to be truly creative once you know the basic photography techniques. If you look at any camera club competition, you will find that the winner is not the person with the most expensive camera. Invariably, it is the person with the imagination and skills to get the best out of the camera they have.

Better Wildlife Photos

Wildlife photography can be one of the most challenging and rewarding fields of nature photography. With digital cameras creating such widespread interest in all types of photography, new photographers all over the world are taking an interest in wildlife photography.

Most of the photography guides these days focus on the technical aspects of the camera: but really good photography relies more on composition, lighting, and sensitivity to your subject. This means you can improve your photography by thinking creatively, not technically.

Get to the subject's eye level

Wildlife photos are most effective if they create an intimate connection between the subject and the viewer. The best way to do this is to take your photo at the subject's eye level. This way, the viewer can feel like they are looking at the subject from inside its little world, rather from the outside looking in.

If, for example, your subject is low to the ground (like a lizard, frog, or even a pet), crouch or lie flat, getting as low as possible so you can take your photo at the subject's eye level.

It's all in the eyes

The personal connection mentioned in tip #1 is really about eye contact, so it is important to get the eyes right. If the eyes in your wildlife photo are sharp and clear, the photo will probably work. If they are out of focus, lost in shadow, or if the subject blinks or turns its eyes away, the connection will be lost, and the photo will almost certainly fail.

You don't even need your whole subject to be in focus. Your animal could be mostly hidden by leaves, in shadow and out of focus. The picture could still work...as long as the eyes are open and captured sharply in the picture.

If the background doesn't help, get rid of it

Many wildlife photos are spoiled because the background is cluttered, distracting, ugly, or just plain inappropriate. For example, seagulls on a beach can be quite beautiful, but seagulls at the local rubbish tip are a different matter. Also, wildlife photos look far less natural if you can tell they were taken in a zoo. Apply this principle: "Anything that does not make my photo better, makes it worse."

This does not mean you can't take a good wildlife photo at the zoo, at the tip, or anywhere else for that matter. You just need to manage it. If your background is spoiling your shot, zoom right in on the subject to eliminate as much of the background as possible. By zooming in, you will also reduce the depth of field to a minimum, so any background that does appear in your photo will be out of focus and less distracting.

If your background is working for you, use it well

A wildlife photograph that captures the subject in a beautiful natural setting can be even more effective than a simple close-up. My photos of a kangaroo on the beach, for example, show the subject in an unexpected context, making a more interesting image than a close-up portrait style photo.

If you take your wildlife subject as part of a wider landscape, you need to consider all the techniques of composition that apply to landscape photography. Remember the rule of thirds (which may or may not help) and be careful to position your animal so that the subject and the background work together to make a more effective composition. In particular, try to have your wildlife subject looking into the picture, not out of it.

Capture your subject in the best possible light

Even the most perfectly composed wildlife photo can fail because of bad lighting. Losing your subject in the shadows, glare reflecting off shiny feathers, and shadows across the face of the subject are all simple mistakes that can ruin a photo.

There is no single rule for lighting in a wildlife photograph, but here are some suggestions. I often find the best results when the sky is lightly overcast with thin cloud. This produces light that is bright, but soft and even compared to full sunlight. Your subject will be well illuminated, but you avoid harsh contrast and heavy shadows that rob the image of important detail.

If the weather is sunny, try to take your photos early and late in the day when the sun is low. At these times the light is soft and warmly coloured. It is also easier to catch the full face of your subject in sunlight, rather than half-observed by shadow.

So there you have my five tips for wildlife photography. I could cheat and add tip #6: take lots of photos. Animals move, blink, flap their wings, and generally find ways to frustrate the wildlife photographer. Don't forget, with digital photography it costs you nothing to keep snapping. So practice, persevere, and try out these tips...you could be taking better photos in no time.

Photographing Landscapes With Character

Landscape photography is a most rewarding pastime, but it can be far more challenging than some people imagine.

It sounds so easy; visit a beautiful location, shoot a few snapshots, and come home with a work of art in your camera. After dealing with the public for over 20 years, I swear most people think it really is that simple.

But really good landscape photography is much more challenging. Anyone can recognize the potential of a good subject, but turning that potential into a memorable image is another story. The task is even greater if it is a popular location. When you photograph a place that is photographed a thousand times a day, you have to find a way to create something different from the everyday snapshot.

Here are just a few tips for capturing the character of a landscape.

You don't have to fit everything in

Some panoramic views are so huge that the only way to fit everything into your photo is to use a very wide-angle lens. The trouble is, this reduces everything in size, so that the grandeur of your subject is diminished.

It can be more effective to concentrate your composition around one feature of the landscape; a feature other people will recognize. With this approach, you can use a larger lens to add size and prominence to the subject. You may also capture details that could be lost with a wide-angle lens.

Look for a new angle

Why is it that so many photos of the great landmarks look the same? Because they are taken from the same lookouts that everybody else uses. It is easy to get a good shot from a major lookout; in fact, that is probably why the lookout was built in the first place. The trouble is, it is almost impossible to get a unique shot if your photo is taken from the same angle as all the others.

If possible, search beyond the established lookouts to see if there is a more interesting angle to take your photo. This may take a little more effort, and you may have to do some bushwalking to find the best spot. I don't suggest risking your neck or trespassing, but in most cases there are alternatives to the established lookouts.

Use the surroundings to your advantage

Anyone can take a snapshot of a mountain range. But what about a mountain range framed through the branches of a tree in the foreground, or with a river winding away into the distance, drawing with it the eye of the viewer?

There is always more than one way to photograph a landscape, and the most obvious one is not always the best. By scouting around and looking for interesting foregrounds, you can add real character to your image and create something truly unique.

Always try to remember that you are not the first person to photograph this subject. To create a memorable image, you need to use some imagination and try something a little different.

Consider the conditions

Getting the best light for your subject can be a delicate balancing act. First you need to consider the time of day. Usually the ideal light is early in the morning and late in the afternoon, when the light is softer and more colourful. The trouble is, any photographer with experience already knows that. So how do you take your photo to the next level?

Keep a constant eye on the weather. You may be able to see something special, like a storm front, a good cloud formation, or even a good chance of a rainbow, starting to develop. If you choose your moment just right, you can be on location in time for something really special.

This is a measure of the commitment of a landscape photographer. The more effort you put in, the greater the rewards. You will spend a lot of time waiting for the right moment, but once you get that perfect image, you will see it was not time wasted. You will know you have done a good job when people start to say "I have been there - but my photos are nowhere near as good as yours!"

Better Beach Photography

Nature photographers, landscape photographers, wedding photographers, hobby photographers... who doesn't love an excuse to take some photos at the beach? It is human nature to want to take photos of the places we are drawn to personally, so the beach is a great source of inspiration for photographers at all levels.

Beach photography can be particularly challenging, even for experienced nature photographers. We are often inspired by the sounds, the smells, and the open space; so the job of the photographer is not just to photograph a place, but to capture a feeling.

This can make beach photography a deeply personal thing, so your approach to a photo will be guided by what that location means to you. However, there are some easy ways to add impact to your pictures. Here are five simple tips to help you enjoy your next beach photography outing.

Time of day

Every landscape photographer knows that early in the morning and late in the afternoon are the best times for taking outdoor photos. At these times the sunlight is soft and warmly coloured, and shining from a low angle to illuminate most subjects more evenly.

This is even more critical at the beach, particularly if your beach has white sand. If you take your photos in the middle of the day, the glare from the sand and the white water will create stark, high-contrast photos that will not do justice to the location. However, when the sun is low it will illuminate the entire scene with much warmer colours. The froth at the water's edge will light up like champagne bubbles, and the whole photo will be richer and more atmospheric.

Get down to the water's edge

To get the best beach photos, be prepared to get your feet wet. Down at the water's edge where the sand is wet, your foregrounds will be more colourful, and wiped clean of footprints, tyre tracks and other distractions that can spoil the natural look of a beach photo. You may also discover reflections that add interest to otherwise plain foregrounds.

Find an eye-catching feature

A long, empty expanse of white sand with a clear blue sky is perfect for a walk on the beach, but can be too empty and plain for a photograph. You should try to find a feature to build your composition around. Many beaches have a rocky headland at each end; head for the rocks to find a more interesting foreground. Not only will your photos have a stronger focal point; they will also have more appeal for viewers who can identify familiar features in the image.

Once you start looking, there are all types of features on a beach that can add interest to your composition; driftwood, shells, rocks, lifesavers' flags...just be creative and the list is endless.

Make the most of a good sky

A clear blue sky at the beach can be a thing of beauty - and can also be a photographer's worst enemy. A great cloud formation can add a whole new dimension to your photo, especially if you can't find anything of interest in the foreground.

Even if it quite overcast, don't despair. With a little luck, you might be able to capture the magnificent effect of sunbeams over the water as the sun rises or sets behind the clouds. Remember that beach photos don't always have to be bright and sunny. We see enough of that in advertising and the movies. The photos that stand out from the crowd are often the ones with dark skies and brooding atmosphere, not white sand and blue sky.

Use your wide angle lens

A wide-angle lens can be the best way to capture that sense of isolation and distance that you often feel when walking on the beach. The smaller lens exaggerates the perspective, making the background appear to stretch away for many miles and creating a real sense of three-dimensional depth. If you are looking up the beach, you can capture everything from the swirling water right in front of you to the lighthouse in the distance. Even better, the stronger depth of field of the wide-angle lens lets you keep it all in focus.

This 'wide-open-spaces' effect can look plain and empty if your scene lacks features, so remember Tips #3 and #4 and make the most of your skies and foregrounds. Obviously the wide-angle lens is not the best option for every photo, but it not a bad place to start if you are looking for ideas.

So there you have my simple tips for beach photography. This is by no means a comprehensive guide. As with all nature photography, beach photography is an adventure that never ends. You never get tired of taking photos, and you never take two photos quite the same. Still, if this little article encourages you to get out there and practice, then you are one step closer to becoming a better photographer.

If Only I Had A Better Camera...

"If only I had a better camera, I could take great photos like these!" That is something I hear every day in my gallery, and I am sure many photographers hear the same thing. People walk around a display of professional photography, and think that it is the camera, not the photographer, who is responsible for the great photos.

Pride makes it hard to admit that we are just not very good at something. Photography is no exception: much easier to blame the camera. The trouble is, if we want to take better photos, will buying a better camera make that happen?

Of course not.

The truth is, you can take better photos no matter what sort of camera you have. Digital cameras have become so advanced that almost all cameras now have aperture and shutter speed settings, not to mention amazingly powerful optical zoom lenses. These are features that, until very recently, were only available on SLR cameras. So if you want to take better photos, the features are right there in front of you. All you have to do is take the time to learn how to use them.

To take better photos, start with the manual that came with your camera. It will tell you how to operate the major settings, although it may not be so good at explaining what they are for. Then find the information you need to understand how those settings will help you take better photos. There are courses, workshops, books and ebooks that will tell you what you need to know.

Make sure the course or ebook you choose is about how to take better photos. These days, a lot of the information out there is about fixing your photos on a computer, and not about taking better photos.

A lot of what you can learn has nothing to do with the camera. That's right; you can improve your photography without changing one thing about your camera. My experience in nature photography has taught me that the way you use the light to capture your subject makes a huge difference. The weather and the time of day can affect the light, so your timing and patience can be the difference between a snapshot and a great photo.

Developing a good eye for visual balance and composition is another aspect to taking better photos that has nothing to do with what sort of camera you have. You can go a long way towards better photography by learning to think like an artist, not like a tourist. A good guide to photography should teach you this important element of photography as well.

Here are a few simple examples. If you are photographing a waterfall, try looking at the scene creatively. Perhaps you can stand back and take a photo that follows the flow of water upstream, with the waterfall in the background. Or you could try looking through the branches of a tree, to frame the subject, rather than just snapping the first and most obvious angle.

When photographing people and animals, think about the best way to position them to make a stronger composition. Instead of putting them in the middle of the photo looking

straight at the camera, try positioning them to one side, looking in towards the centre of the picture.

These are just a couple of simple ideas to get you thinking. The point is this: you can take great strides to becoming a better photographer by concentrating on the artistic aspects of the craft, rather than just the technical.

Of course, many things you can do with a compact camera, you can do even better if you have an SLR camera. However, buying a better camera is not going to help you take better photos if you just switch it to automatic and keep taking snapshots. So here's my tip. Buy the camera you can afford, then learn how to use it. It's as simple as that. No matter which camera you have, you can take better photos with a bit of knowledge, and a bit of practice. If you decide to upgrade later, so be it, but learning the basics of good photography will get you a lot further than succumbing to the "If only I had a better camera" mindset.

Now, if only I had better golf clubs...

Putting the Nature Back Into Nature Photography

Nature photographers the world over are coming to terms with the digital age, where great nature photos are under suspicion of being altered or enhanced.

In my gallery and on my website, I sell a photograph of a kangaroo on a beach. I am not the only nature photographer in Australia to have captured such a subject, so it is not a unique occurrence; but it is unusual. As such, many people have never seen such a thing with their own eyes.

Ten years ago, when film was standard, people say “Man, you were lucky to see that kangaroo on a beach!” Now, I am more likely to hear the following question:

“Did you superimpose that kangaroo on your computer?”

Sometimes people are polite, but other times I am not so lucky. I have met people who not only assume the photo is a fake, they want to argue with me even after I have told them where, when and how the photo was taken. People like to transfer their own limitations onto others. So, if they could not have taken that picture, they assume that nobody could.

For a nature photographer, the assumption that your nature photo has been manufactured is the same thing as being accused of fraud.

The kangaroo on the beach is the most commented-on image in my collection, but it is by no means the only photo that invites doubt. These days it seems that any nature photo, if unique and perfectly captured (and isn't that what we are all striving for?) is automatically an object of suspicion.

We have entered an era when technology has become so advanced, people have begun to doubt their own eyes when it comes to photography. It is true, some amazing things can be done with software, and many photographers find ‘photoshopping’ an image more interesting than taking the photo in the first place. This is a perfectly legitimate pursuit and one that is simply a fact of life in the modern world.

However, problems arise when people start to forget that good photography, and in particular good nature photography, existed long before the digital age. The skills of nature photography are as they have always been. An ability to read the light, to recognise and capture a spectacular sky, to simply know the time of day and the perfect weather to shoot your subject: these are the stock in trade of the nature photographer. Next comes knowledge of the camera and photography theory, along with a practiced sense of balance and composition.

If you get these right (and there are still plenty of photographers out there who can), you simply don't need to rely on your computer to manufacture a good image. In fact for most nature photographers, the whole point of the pursuit is the joy of capturing a perfect moment using only patience, skill and timing.

Technology is amazing. It is possible to take a sunset sky from one photo, superimpose it on a foreground from another photo, and add a few birds in the sky for good measure. In the case of my photo, perhaps you could add a kangaroo into your beach photo. The point

is why would you, when there is so much satisfaction to be had in finding that beach, and being there to capture the moment for real.

So the next time you see a great nature photo, show some respect for the patience and skills that went in to capturing that image. And if you aspire to one day do the same, try thinking a little less about your computer and a little more about nature. It can only make you a better photographer.

Better Waterfall Photos

For a nature photographer, waterfall photography is like a dream come true. A subject tailor-made for a great image, waterfalls can be a magnet for anyone with a camera.

Like any subject in nature photography, waterfall photos also come with their own set of challenges. A beginner can be disappointed with their results time and time again, simply due to simple mistakes that can be easily overcome. A good waterfall photo does not require hi-tech photography equipment or fancy techniques; just a decent camera and a basic understanding of a few manual settings.

In fact, a really good waterfall photograph probably owes more to good lighting and composition than to technology. This is great news; it means you can improve your waterfall photos no matter what sort of camera you have! Here are simple tips to help you take some great waterfall photos of your own.

Choose the right weather conditions

Many waterfalls are found in the forest, or in heavily wooded areas. That means the same rules of lighting that apply to forest photography also apply to waterfall photos. In most cases, the best results will happen when you take your photos in overcast weather. Cloud cover creates even, low-contrast lighting that eliminates harsh patches of light and shade from your waterfall image. While we are on the subject of lighting; avoid using your flash in most situations. It will destroy the atmosphere of the natural light.

You should also try to avoid windy days. If you are working with a slow shutter, you don't want the trees to be blowing about and blurring the background in your photo.

Experiment with shutter speeds and carry a tripod

You have surely seen the soft wispy effect photographers create by shooting flowing water at very slow shutter speeds. This is a popular technique and has great impact for some photos. However, it is not the only method you should try. Some photos can look great, but if you do all your photos this way it can become boring and repetitive. Also, the wispy effect just doesn't suit every waterfall. In my experience, cascading waterfalls that tumble over rocks and have several levels look great at slow speeds. I usually use a shutter speed of one second. However, waterfalls that fall straight down over a ledge into a pool usually look better with a bit more definition; try a speed of about 30/sec or 15/sec. Experimenting with different speeds will always get you the best result in the end.

Regardless of the effect you are after, you should always have your tripod with you for waterfall photography. If you are in the forest on a cloudy day, the level of light will be very low, and you may find yourself forced to use very slow shutter speeds whether you like it or not.

Explore downstream

When you arrive at your location, the first instinct is usually to stand right in front of the waterfall and take the most straightforward angle. However, the best result is often found when you explore downstream. You may find an angle where the stream cascades toward you, with the main waterfall in the background. Or you may be able to frame waterfall through the branches of the trees. There are plenty of possibilities; the point is, there is never only one shot to take at a waterfall, and the obvious photo is not always the best.

Give your wide-angle lens a workout

A wide-angle lens comes in handy for a few reasons. Firstly, it has a naturally strong depth of field. If you are using a slow shutter speed for the water, it is important to keep the rest of the photo sharp. If your main subject is moving and the surroundings are out of focus, your result will just be a big blur. Secondly, the wide-angle lens has an exaggerated sense of perspective, allowing your viewer to feel that they are looking up the stream or into the forest, not just at a flat picture.

Let the flow of water shape your composition

Whenever you compose a photo, you use the lines and shapes in the picture to create the best impact. The flow of water in a waterfall photo has great visual impact. The viewer's eye will naturally follow the direction of the water, so you should use this to help shape your composition. If you stand downstream so that the stream flows toward the camera, you can create a distinct visual direction in your composition that will truly catch and lead the eye of the viewer.

So, there you have five very simple ways to take better waterfall photos. As in all nature photography, writing and reading about it is never as inspiring as getting out and doing it. I hope these tips give you some motivation to grab a friend, get out there and practice!

Using Natural Light for Great Results

Nature photography requires all the usual camera skills, so it is important to know how to use your camera. But really good nature photography also requires sensitivity to nature.

Have you ever met someone who has thousands of dollars worth of gear, can talk all day about cameras and lenses...but still takes lousy photos? Such people fail to understand that good photographers are not judged by the equipment they use, but by their results. Of course technical knowledge is important, but it will only take you so far.

When it comes to nature photography, it is essential to understand how natural light can transform the impact of a photo.

I have a simple saying for nature photographers to live by: you can't take a good photo in a bad situation. This simply means if you approach your subject at the wrong time of day, or in the wrong weather conditions, no amount of technology is going to solve the problem. On the other hand, if you get the light right, you don't need any technical wizardry to get the shot. Nature does most of the work for you.

As soon as light is mentioned, most people automatically think early morning and late afternoon. Any photographer with an ounce of experience soon learns that these are generally the best times to take nature photos. Although it is not true all the time, it is a good place to start.

When the sun is very low in the sky, it creates a soft, warm light that is very attractive in a photo. Shining from a low angle, it also illuminates the face of the subject more evenly. Furthermore, due to the lower contrast, the shadows you can see are less harsh than in the middle of the day. So for several reasons, early morning (up to about 9am) and late afternoon towards sunset are often the best times to take your photos.

Most people know this. The trouble is, most people don't make the extra effort to put it into practice. Are you prepared to camp overnight to be on location at sunrise to get the perfect shot? If photography is important enough to you, you will go to these lengths and more. It may seem like a lot of trouble, but once you get that once-in-a-lifetime image you will agree that the reward was worth the effort. This is standard practice for a nature photographer.

Should all nature photography be done in the early morning or late afternoon? In a word: no.

All rules are made to be broken. You would be mistaken to think that this one simple approach works all the time. So what are some of the exceptions?

Black and white photography is a little different from other photography. Instead of subjects being defined by subtle shades of colour, black and white photography makes use of strong lines and shadows. The best effect can be produced by higher contrast in the light. So when you are thinking black and white photography, you may find yourself seeking the brighter light of the middle part of the day.

Forest photography is another departure from general landscape photography. Under the forest canopy, the sunlight can become such a patchwork of light and shade that a perfect exposure is impossible. For the best results in the forest, I usually look for overcast

conditions, with perhaps a little mist for added atmosphere. To avoid a too-dark image, I take my photos in the middle part of the day, when the light is bright, but evenly dispersed by the cloudy conditions.

When it comes to wildlife photography, you can take a lesson from the landscape and a lesson from the forest. If you photograph your subject in sunlight, early in the morning and late in the afternoon is usually best. This approach reduces contrast and bathes your subject in soft, warm light.

However, some wildlife subjects are best captured on a cloudy day, just like in the forest. The muted light eliminates a lot of glare, so shiny surfaces (a frog's skin, a bird's feathers etc) can appear much clearer and more colourful on a cloudy day. The lower contrast of this light also means important details of the subject will not be lost in shadow.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of examples. You could go on forever identifying which subjects work best in different types of light. I simply hope these ideas get you thinking about natural light and how it can improve your photography. Once you let nature do most of the work for you, you may just find that the technical aspects of photography become a little less challenging.