



My New Favorite Lens

(The versatile Sigma 100-400mm)

Companies like Sigma and Tamron continue to produce great lenses at excellent prices giving Canon and Nikon some needed competition. I believe this is a positive thing because it provides a variety of photographers more options at price points that allow them to get more for their money. I think this is a big win for photographers.

The popular super-telephoto category of lenses has provided so many photographers a foray into wildlife photography as well as other applications.

Lenses like Sigma or Tamron's 150-600mm models have allowed entry into a market that was once reserved only for those that could spend \$2000 or more. Even my own interest in wildlife photography started after I got my first 500mm lens many years ago. The popularity of these 150-600mm super telephotos at sometimes half the price of comparable Nikon and Canon lenses has been an awesome advance in photography over the last 2-3 years. Coming in at \$900-1300 brand new and weighing a little over 4lbs, these lenses have taken over the market. In fact, they became so prominent in our classes for our students that we developed a Super-Telephoto class just to help introduce participants to some of the finer techniques to get the most out of their "new" lenses.

However, while having a magnification of 600mm on today's camera bodies is sometimes what is needed especially with smaller subjects like birds or far away subjects like the moon; handling and carrying a 4lb plus lens when you are not use to it, is more than what some photographers bargained for. If super telephoto photography always allowed for the photographer to just hop out of their vehicle and take shots, this bulk and weight may not be a hinderance. However, for the average shooter, even with a tripod or monopod, the 600mm lenses are sometimes too big for enjoyable use. Furthermore, for those who travel and might want to get a little closer than their 70-200mm or 18-300mm can get them, the practicality of hauling their 600mm lens is a non-starter for many. Finally, the techniques that are needed to track quickly moving subjects or to be steady for stationary images are not for the faint of heart. This is why many times we see photographers who do not get sharp images from their super-telephoto lenses. It can be done but takes a lot of practice and in the end, a certain amount of desire to carry the lens around with you.

This is where I think the new crop of 100-400mm lenses foot the bill. In 2017, both Sigma and Tamron released 100-400mm lenses that blew the Nikon and Canon counterparts out of the water in the categories of weight, bulk and price. I contend they are just as sharp if not sharper than the other guys as well. The contrasts of the Sigma with the Nikon 80-400mm or Canon 100-400mm are stunning. The Sigma 100-400mm weighs in at 2.55lbs, has image stabilization, measures 7.18 inches in length and has a normal retail price of \$800 and is often on sale for \$100 less. It uses a 67mm filter thread so that should give you an idea of the compact dimension as well. The maximum aperture range is F5-6.3 which is completely sufficient for the type of shooting it is likely to be used for. In comparison, the Canon 100-400mm is just a little longer at 7.6 inches but weighs a pound more at 3.6 lbs, uses 77mm filters and has a price point of \$2000! The maximum aperture range is F4.5-5.6 but the premium price is still hard to justify. The Nikon 80-400mm F4.5-5.6 is 8 inches long, uses a 77mm filter and weighs in just under the

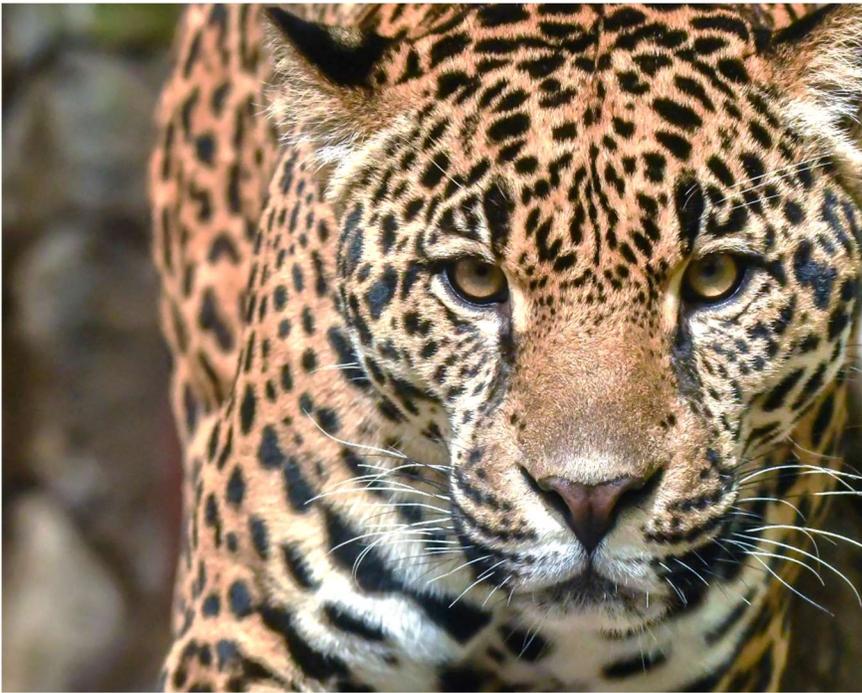
Canon model at 3.45lb. However, the price is \$2300 making it the highest of the 100-400mm lens options.

What I think is significant about these specifications is not only the cost savings but how much more manageable a 100-400mm telephoto zoom would be if the 150-600mm is too big for many users. The weight of the larger lenses (150-600mm) is not only an issue with transportation but in many situations, maneuverability. When shooting fast moving sports or birds in flight, the ability to pan with the lens can be a lot more critical to great images than the maximum focal length range. At 7 inches long, a 100-400mm would easily fit into most common camera bags, serve as a general telephoto (taking the place of a normal 70-300mm range), and yet provide the option for tighter crops of longer range subjects. This would not just include animals but could be incredibly useful for daytime sports and travel photography. In fact, many photographers in hindsight might have forgone the normal 55-300, 70-300mm kit lens for a 100-400mm that would serve multiple purposes.

The Sigma lens does not have a tripod collar like the Tamron counterpart but given the lighter weight of this model, the lens is handheldable in almost all situations and especially when compared to the 150-600mm. The optical stabilization works very well and is a big help with the magnification (and resulting shake) this lens can produce. Do remember though that you are always supposed to turn off the OS when the camera and lens is on a tripod and this is even more true with Sigma. Forgetting to do so will almost always cause blur in your images due to the stabilization motor working in a situation where there is no movement to correct. The lens has a minimum focusing distance of 5.25 ft which can come in handy photographing flowers and butterflies for close-up work and also has a focus limit switch. There are two optical stabilization modes and according to the manual for the lens, OS 1 is for normal situations and OS 2 is for panning situations. Finally, the lens has a unique feature where it can be zoomed either by rotating the zoom ring (the standard method on most lenses) or by grabbing the groove in the provided lens hood and simply pushing and pulling the zoom as desired. Some people find the push/pull method easier for many situations.

Focus speed is fast and accurate and there is no question it is sharp. I have been a believer in the incredible image quality of the 150-600mm big brother model and this one did not disappoint. In fact, below are a few images to show you just how sharp this lens can resolve.

In summary, what the 150-600mm lens craze has started, the Sigma 100-400mm carries on. For those that find the 600mm lenses too heavy, this lens crosses over the worlds of standard telephoto and super telephoto maybe providing the best compromise for those wanting to do wildlife photography all the way to the landscape/travel photographer who wants options without the bulk. The quality of the images this lens produces is stunning and the amateur photographer who might not have the large lens skills finetuned yet, will find this lens to be very handheldable for tight shots. With a price point of \$700 on sale compared to Canon and Nikon's \$2000 and \$2300 respectively, it makes super telephoto photography accessible and fun to so many more enthusiasts and gives professionals a break from the burden of monster lenses.



1/2500, F6.3, ISO 3200 at 160mm



1/1250, F6.3, ISO 400 at 280mm



1/400, F11, ISO 400 at 145mm



1/1000, F8, ISO 2000 at 400mm



1/1000, F10, ISO 900 at 220mm