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Editor's Note

Anybody who has seen my Facebook page knows that I've been photographing a lot of baseball games the last three years. That's what happens when you have two grandsons playing travel ball.

Time I'm at the baseball diamond is obviously time not spent photographing nature. But while I'm photographing action shots of the Carolina Lightning 10 U and 11 U teams, I'm also practicing techniques I'll use when I'm photographing birds in flight.

In this issue, Brian Osborne tells us how sports photography is a good and accessible way to practice wildlife photography.

We also have details of the 2019 Fall Photo Weekend that will be held in the Upstate in November. During that event, you'll get a chance to explore some locations with which you may not be familiar and you'll get the opportunity to revisit those you are.

And we've a sampling of images taken during the recent Education Weekend in Charleston.

This issue of Camera in the Wild also includes some of our members' favorite places in the Carolinas, some far-off locations and how to photograph birds in your backyard.

Enjoy.

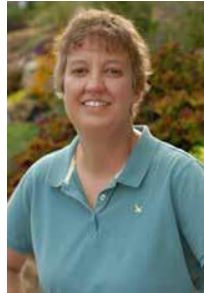
Cover Shot

Photographer: Barry Wheeler
Description: Plant life
NIKON D850 1/60 sec; f/8; ISO 400; 60 mm

Back Cover Shot

Photographer: Lisa DuBois
Description: Tricolored Heron pair
NIKON D500 1/2000 sec; f/6.0; ISO 200; 400 mm

Camera in the Wild is a quarterly member-generated publication of the Carolina Nature Photographers Association. Submissions are welcome from CNPA members. Submission guidelines are available by emailing Camera in the Wild Editor Cindy Landrum at clandrm@gmail.com.



Shooting Sports Can Make You a Better Wildlife Photographer

By Brian Osborne
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It may be a little of an adrenaline junky. I love the thrill of that split-second we get in the field to capture a great wildlife image.

Whether a magnificent elk of Cataloochee Valley, a bald eagle hitting the water with its talons extended for fish on the James River, or even just the perfect songbird in the back yard, they are all exciting subjects to photograph. As a photo expedition leader who travels to the above locations and more, shooting wildlife has been a joy to my participants and me.

However, all of us know that while part of the challenge is finding the wildlife, the bigger challenge can be having the correct camera settings and the solid telephoto lens technique to actually capture the images.

The question for many of us is how do we become better wildlife photographers when we only get a few chances to actually practice our skills? My answer is simple—shoot sports!

Many years ago, part of my adrenaline drive caused me to get out on sports fields or courts. There is something exciting about being on the sidelines of a recreation league, high school, college, or even professional sporting event. With action occurring right in front of you and with the realization that the spectators are far behind you in the stands, I think it's the best seat in the house. Watching from afar does not do it for me like being right there does.

Many photographers either think they do not need to practice their wildlife photography skills or never consider sports as a photography outlet. However, nothing could be further from the truth. We have a saying in my photography group: "If you can shoot sports, you can shoot anything."

Why, you might ask? Well, for one thing, if you can handle the technical aspects of photography (camera settings, zooming in, focusing) and do so quickly (which is needed for sports), then you can succeed in other applications of these skills.

In the case of wildlife photography, I would take it a step further. I believe the camera settings, equipment techniques, and even observation skills needed to be a good wildlife photographer are identical to what's needed to be a good sports photographer. Let me describe what I mean.

Camera Settings

In sports, the goal is usually to use a fast enough shutter speed to freeze the motion of whatever action we are shooting.



Focus Tracking Sports



Focus Tracking Wildlife

Our autofocus has to be set up to track moving subjects and our focus area mode has to match our ability to keep a fast-moving subject in the frame. Given how many images I might shoot of just one game in any sport, it is important for me to get my exposure and color correct in the camera so I do not have to try to fix it in post processing. I have something called my "Killer Checklist," where I list the eight camera settings that have to be set correctly to capture any given shot.

My Killer Checklist for sports would be as follows:

Aperture priority mode with a wide-open aperture to produce shallow depth of field (and to give me a faster shutter speed). For most sports, I would want a shutter speed minimum of 1/800 to stop the motion. Either with Auto ISO (if my camera lets me set a minimum shutter speed default) or manually, low-light conditions often mean I need a much higher ISO to get the appropriate shutter speed.



Timing Sports



Angle and Background Sports

Finally, for white balance, I usually do a custom WB reading or find a preset (or Kelvin temp) that gives me accurate color reproduction for the given lighting condition. While this sounds like a lot of things, they are all critically important and with practice, I can fine tune them in just a few seconds of shooting.

To show how similar my checklist is for Wildlife, here it is:

Mode: A or AV

Aperture and Shutter Speed: Low or wide open aperture and a minimum shutter speed of 1/500 or faster depending on the lens.

ISO: 400 as a default starting place and then higher based on what it takes to get the appropriate shutter speed (Auto ISO can be used as well).

AF Mode: AFC or AI Servo

AF Area Mode: Dynamic, expanded point or group

Exposure Compensation: +/- 0 and then adjusted based off reviewing my test shot's histogram

White Balance: Custom WB, Preset or Kelvin

You might ask why the shutter speed in the list above has to be so fast when the animals we are photographing might not be moving much or at all. My answer is, because of the focal length that we are often using for wildlife photos.

My rule is to use a shutter speed of 1/2X the focal length (ex. 400mm lens would be 1/800 minimum shutter speed). This results in about the same shutter speed

as we used to freeze action. The good news is that if the animal is moving, you should not have to adjust your shutter speed much from what you already have set for the lens. Likewise, if the animal is in poor light (early morning, shade, etc.) the ISO range needed to accomplish the correct shutter speed and aperture is about the same as for nighttime sports. Hopefully this illustrates how similar both types of photography are in regards to camera settings.

Equipment

The equipment used to shoot sports is often similar, especially in weight and size, to what would be used for wildlife.

For sports in low light situations, I almost always need a 70-200mm F2.8, or in my case, 120-300mm F2.8 lens. These lenses are heavier and larger than what most photographers are used to for other types of photography.



Angle and Background Wildlife

It is not unusual for nighttime or inside sports to require ISO 3200-6400 and sometimes higher. My camera needs to be set on continuous focusing (AF-C on Nikon and most brands, AI Servo on Canon).

While using a single AF point area mode might seem like a good idea, keeping a moving subject in the area of one focus sensor is very difficult and can cause you to miss shots. Therefore, I use Nikon's Dynamic 9 or 25, which is similar to Canon's expanded point mode. If your camera has a zone focusing or group area mode, this can be ideal as well.

On my checklist is that I need to start at an exposure compensation of 0 and then take a test shot of the area where I expect the athletes to be. I review my histogram and flashing highlights and adjust to a minus or plus exposure compensation as needed.



Timing Wildlife



Timing Wildlife



Focus Tracking Wildlife



Focus Tracking Sports

For wildlife, the same lenses would be a good starting place. I might want to use something with more focal length range such as my Sigma 100-400mm or 150-600mm. In the case of the two above lenses, the 100-400mm has about the same weight and size as my 70-200mm 2.8.

While the 150-600mm is a little lighter than my 120-300mm F2.8, it is certainly in the same ballpark. In fact, many wildlife photographers use 300mm F2.8, 400mm F2.8 or 500mm F4 lenses, which are about identical in weight to my 120-300mm. Knowing how to best focus these lenses, stabilize them, pan with them, etc., is a challenge and I believe a learned technique. What a great opportunity to improve our camera handling skills (and build some arm muscles at the same time!) by shooting sporting events for practice so we are ready for capturing wildlife.

Observation skills

Developing observation skills may be the biggest reason why shooting sports to practice skills will improve your wildlife photography.

While it sounds counterintuitive, I have found that observation is hard for photographers. We get so involved in creating images,

getting our cameras set up properly, and tracking the subject in the viewfinder that we often do not observe well.

What do I mean by this? In sports, it means knowing how the game is played, watching it on TV and not just shooting it, looking at others' photos all make it much easier to be at the right place at the right time, and having the camera ready to capture that great shot (if it happens).

I often encourage my students to put their cameras down from their faces for a minute to just watch the movement on the ball field. Once they have a visual of where and what is taking place, they are much more in tune to get the camera to find and track the action, often depressing the shutter button a split second earlier in order to nail the shot.

Animal behavior is often the same. If we are just trying to look through the viewfinder and snap a few quick images of the animal, we are often behind. However, if we have been watching or learning about a certain animal's tendencies and general behavior (even if it is just watching them for a minute or so), we are so much more prepared when they raise their heads, fly to the right perch, start to run, or pause. Some animals are more consistent in their behavior than others, but in general, with a little patience (non-shooting often) we can figure out where the animals are, when they are there, and how they react to stimuli.

Of course, good awareness of our subject and our surroundings can keep us safe as well. On the sports field, I always remind photographers to keep their other eye (the one not in the viewfinder) open at all times because it is the athlete or ball that you do not see through the tight crop of your lens that can really hurt you. The same is true with animals!

Unless you feel like you have unlimited wildlife opportunities to hone and practice your skills and techniques, I think sports is the ultimate training ground. Sporting activities that are open to photographers are all around if you look for them. Photographing an activity you have never shot before can be difficult and intimidating, but so can capturing animals.

It's better to get your routine, equipment and techniques in a place when missing a shot is not a big deal. When I am shooting a sport I taking hundreds of images during a game, so missing a few shots is no biggie. It's totally different when you have spent days looking not only for the right animal but with the best background and light. This is not the time to be practicing, but rather the time to be doing great photography.

Plus, photographing a sport might be more fun than you think. I recently attended a sports photography workshop in Los Angeles. I shot three additional sports, bringing my list to 24. I watched our instructors, many of whom were accomplished sports photographers and knew, without a doubt, if they every took up wildlife photography, they would be awesome at it.

Favorite Places in the Carolinas - Green Pond

By Malena Kee
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Green Pond is located about 50 minutes south of Charleston, South Carolina on Highway 17. This area is home to Donnelly WMA and Bear Island WMA. The wildlife management areas are within 14 miles of each other and two of my favorite locations in the Carolinas.

Donnelly is right off Hwy. 17 and is comprised of more than 8,000 acres of protected land. The entrance road passes through long stands of pines trees and curves around live oak trees draped with Spanish moss. It has been designated an Important Bird Area by Audubon Society. About a half mile into the drive, there's a long causeway you'll cross on the lower end of the backwater. This is a prime habitat for moorhens, rails, wading birds, and waterfowl.

As you continue down the road, there's a longleaf pine area that's home to bluebirds, woodpeckers and other songbirds. There are numerous crops planted along the road that provides for the turkey and quails. In late summer when the sunflower crops are in bloom, you may be lucky enough to see painted buntings.

Follow the main road to the rice trunk waterways behind the lodge. This area is home to more than 200 alligators. During the warmer months, you may see a couple dozen laying on the dikes getting some sun. Throughout the year, this area is home to great blue herons, egrets, tri-colored herons, black crown night herons, yellow crown night herons and bald eagles. Winter migration visitors include rosetta spoonbills, white pelicans, wood storks, dowitchers, green winged teal and other waterfowl ducks. The black-bellied whistling duck population has been increasing here, too. Donnelly is open year round except designated hunt days.



If you continue through Donnelly, it will take you to Bennett's Point Road. Turn right and it will take you to Bear Island WMA. Bear Island consist of 5,385 acres of managed impoundments. It's a major wintering area for waterfowl and an important shore-bird area during migration. Bald eagles are known to nest in this area. Several wading birds can be found at Bear Island, including wood storks, egrets, little blue heron, tri-colored heron, white ibis, and glossy ibis. Migratory birds include rosetta spoonbill, white pelican, tundra swan, yellowlegs, dowitcher, common snipe, and avocet.

Bear Island is open from Feb. 9 to Oct. 31 for public visitation. A great time to visit is February and March, as the driving tour is open and you can drive by several impoundments where several of the migratory birds visit.

I hope you will visit these two locations and enjoy them as much as I do. I've never been disappointed. Just keep an open mind on what you'll see as we can't order up wildlife.

