

## Some thoughts about photographing Wildlife in Action ©Ron Hasty March 3, 2012

You have to anticipate the action. IF YOU SEE IT, YOU ARE TOO LATE! The best wildlife images will be captured when the critters are active early in the morning and late in the evening. You have about 2 hours from dawn and then from 2 hours from before dusk to dark. In between, put your camera up, download images, take a nap and do some scouting.

You must study and know your subject. How fast does an eagle fly? How fast do children move? Is the subject moving toward you or across your field of view? How much faster/slower is the action? You should have the right equipment: fast lens, camera with fast frames per second, big cards because you will shot a lot and not keep many (edit ruthlessly).

For example, I shoot wild life with a Nikon D700, about 7 frames a second, in Manual mode, f4 and auto ISO (If you use EV in Manual mode on a Nikon (it adjusts the ISO)), with white balance (WB) set in Kelvin to match the light temperature. On the Nikon, set WB in K and use Live View. The rear scroll wheel will simply go through the 8 presets, but if you use the front scroll button you get 32 WB settings. Auto WB may usually work ok and you can adjust it in ACR but I find it better to set it as close as possible in the camera. Why Manual? I set the shutter speed to match the subject movement i.e. little girls basketball about 1/250 -1/320, and the aperture to get the depth of field necessary to capture the full subject. A diving eagle about 1/1250 and a flying eagle at 1/600. A song bird may be at 1/2000 second. A leopard turning its head use about 1/320. You may need an aperture as much as F5.6 to get a larger critter all in focus depending on the focal plane of the subject. REMEMBER, THE DEPTH OF FIELD DECREASES AS YOUR FOCAL LENGTH INCREASES.

I was photographing our 10 year old granddaughter playing basketball in a poorly lit church gym. I used a 70-200 at f2.8, 1/250 and ISO at 4000. I could get three to good four shots with the ball in the air from a free throw. Use your menu to set it for high ISO noise reduction. Depending on your camera your noise will be acceptable at different levels of ISO. You can use a PS plug in like Topaz DeNoise to help with noise reduction. (Topaz Lab – download a free 30 day trial) It is better than PS CS5. I usually shoot large JPG for something like the kids where I will do little editing and not large prints. Otherwise I always shoot raw because you get so much more editing power, and I think richer colors, in ACR and Photoshop with the larger file.

Use a Tripod or a monopod. A gimbal head is best on a Tripod and a ball head on monopod. For the best value: <http://www.jobu-design.com/index.html> Try spot metering and spot focus. Your goal is to have the eyes in focus. You can get away with some softness elsewhere if the eye is in focus. Experiment with spot vs. Matrix.

My favorite lens is a NIKON 200-400 F4. I often use with it with 1.4 teleconverter to get 560 mm but lose you a stop of light. Sharlott likes a Nikon 70-200 with her Nikon D300 (1.5 crop) and a 2x teleconverter to get out to 600 mm but she loses 2 stops of light. On a January trip to Africa I used a Sigma 150-500 f5 – f6.3 because it is lighter than the 200-400 and works well on a Monopod in a Land Rover. I didn't need a faster lens because the African light is bright and I use auto ISO anyway because the light is changing so fast early and late. You can manually set the ISO toward the desired 100-200 ISO after the sun is well up.

Use rear button auto focus if you can. It is much easier for me to track movement. Practice panning to freeze the action of a fast moving subject with a blurred background to feel movement. If you are anticipating a something like a bird getting ready to fly or a player driving to the goal, pre-focus lock on where you want the capture to occur.

BTW Larger birds often defecate and raise their shoulder shortly before taking flight. When you have the bird in your frame, and you see this happen, starting firing off shots, because a bird in flight is much more impressive image than one while it is rested on a tree branch.

DO SOME STUDY AND PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRATICE. There are many websites with articles to help you. <http://www.nigeldennis.com/tips.htm>, <http://www.steePhill.tv/photography/action-photography-tips.html> <http://www.tutorial9.net/tutorials/photography-tutorials/wildlife-photography-tips-take-better-wildlife-photos/>

Good luck. Ron Hasty