

Getting Started in Wildlife Photography

"Things I would have done, if I knew what I know now"

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I am often asked by young men and women in high school and college "What do I need to do to get into wildlife & nature photography?" Whether you would like to photograph wildlife & nature as a lifelong profession or as a serious amateur, there are a few "qualities" you must possess:

Passion!

If you love observing and photographing wildlife in their natural habitat and you get a rush every time you are able to share a few special moments with your subject, then you have something no one can ever take away from you. Passion! Hold on to it as few people are lucky enough to experience it in life or in their photography.

Patience & Perseverance

Nothing great ever happened overnight. As with any art or skill, the more you practice, the better you become. You must get out and shoot as often as possible in order to hone your photographic techniques & skills. If you practice enough at home, when you go out in the field you will be able to observe and concentrate on what's going on around you rather than fooling around with your equipment. You must work hard, even if you get frustrated. Never give up!

Ability to Set and Achieve Your Goals

Once you learn to set short-term and long-term goals AND more importantly, know how good it feels to reach your goals, nothing will be able to stop you!

Now What?

If you possess these qualities, what steps should you take to become a wildlife photographer? I personally feel that education is the key. If I were to go back and "do it all over again" I would major in wildlife biology. I would also take a few courses in photography, art (design), journalism or creative writing and a course in public speaking. If fitness & survival classes were offered, I would enjoy these as well. Of course, these are not your only choices. It might be advantageous to work with a field biologist and learn as much as you can about habitat and wildlife behavior.

I worked for the college newspaper as a photographer and page editor. The experience I gained shooting football really helped me when it came to photographing wildlife. How's that? Well, you have to be able to follow the action very quickly. Also, by knowing a lot about football, I was able to anticipate what was going to happen. The same holds true for wildlife photography. By knowing my subjects, I am better able to anticipate what they might do next. This just might put me in the "right place, at the right time".

In addition to school, reading is an excellent way to continue to learn as much as possible about nature, wildlife, the environment and photography. There are many excellent books available on these subjects. You should never stop "learning". I am always searching for new books to read. I want to learn as much as possible about my subjects so that I have the "tools" to capture them properly on film.

Photography seminars and workshops can also be great learning experiences. I also would suggest you find a mentor to study under. One of the best ways to do this is to join a local camera club. Nothing beats hands-on learning under a skilled and knowledgeable wildlife photographer.

The main thing to keep in mind is that once you set your goals, you need to stay focused, work hard and shoot often. Life is too short, enjoy what you are doing and have fun!

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