

Advice for photographing wildlife locally and using your iPhone

A. Jan Wegenn

Jan has been a professional photographer for 15 years. Check out his 'Perch' web series on photographing birds. He uses a 600 mm lens (which cannot be compared with the small lens and capacity of the phone cameras.) He tries to use about f8 which gives sufficient DOF to get the bird all in focus, and a shutter speed of 1/400 or less to capture movement. On a cloudy day this would be with an ISO of around 1600.

His advice:

- 1. Try to get to the bird's level.** Obviously this isn't always possible, but is very effective when shooting ground or water birds. It means you can look the bird in the eye, and it can look directly at you/the camera, which is always engaging.
- 2. Check the background.** Often when photographing animals or plants there is a lot of distracting material around and behind the subject. And it is easy to forget, in the excitement of finding a great subject, that the shot would be better if you deliberately composed the background to be as simple as possible. To achieve this, try different shots from different angles and viewpoints.
- 3. No need to chase the birds - let them come to you.** Jan has set up on his back patio a stand with a tree branch, food, water, several potted plants and a printed sheet suspended as a simple diffuse background. You can tie specific flowers (he used banksia flowers and got good shots of a rosella and of a miner bird) to the branch, or foods, to encourage specific birds to come and sit there, nice and close for good photos.
- 4. Or find the right birds around you.** Go somewhere where the birds are used to people, they hang around, and you can get up close. Eg. Lillydale lake, zoos, parks, beaches.
- 5. Edit your images.** Some editing can be done in the iPhone app. Jan takes photos in RAW then edits them in Lightroom or Photoshop. For those who believe you shouldn't touch a photo once it's been taken, remember that what the camera captures isn't necessarily what you saw anyway.

Jan has a YouTube channel all about bird photography. At <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoUOPYNZQXRhFrDdffDCVhQ>

Attendee Dianne Lacroix mentioned that **Birdlife Australia has several ethical guidelines** on taking bird photos, such as keeping away from bird nests, not removing foliage so you can get a better picture of a fledgeling. (Birds can be very nervous about such intrusions or alterations and may desert a nest or their young after such human activity.)

B. Tom Kumann

Tom has worked for ACF for 3 years, doing their videos. He grew to love bushland/nature as a child living on a bush block, and like myself, would spend hours rummaging around looking for interesting things. Later he got a camera.....

Taking iPhone photos - getting the most out of your phone camera

His advice:

- 1. Clean your phone camera lens!** It does get grubby. Use a lens tissue or lens cloth.
- 2. Use the camera app in the phone to maximise your images.** Note the symbols above and below the viewfinder screen - Banner above View - Flash, HDR, Live (takes a very short moving image), Timed delay photo, modified exposures choices; and banner below view - Time Lapse/Slo-Mo/Video/Photo/Square/Pano and icon for switching from selfie to view in front lenses. When you want to take the photo, tapping the screen twice gives you AE/AF lock. Pinch two fingers on screen to zoom image before shooting.

If available, choose the highest resolution (check any preferences).

3. **For macro photos**, as its hard to get really close with a phone, buy a cheap clip-on macro/magnifying lens. Or you can try using a magnifying glass, holding it between the camera and the subject. This is where the 'third arm' comes in handy!
For more distant subjects, try a magnifying lens or binoculars - not as sharp as using a camera.
4. **Take lots of photos**. Keep trying different angles and viewpoints - above, below, from side, at eye-level. This will also help if you are uploading images to get ID.
5. **Stabilise your phone**. Jan uses a paper clip (the one with metal hoops) and a cloth tucked inside that for grip, to prop the phone, or there are many commercial ones.
6. **If necessary, try holding the subject still**. A plant stem might be waving in the breeze.
7. **Use the remote/delay timer**. Or use apps that allow you to take motion-triggered photos when you are not around. It might also capture motion. Eg. Flow-shot for iPhone - \$2-3.
8. **Look for and use, or contrive, solid backgrounds** rather than busy divided ones.
 - a. It is easier for the phone camera to focus on the subjects.
 - b. The picture will be much stronger.
9. **Pay attention to light/lighting**. Jan takes RAW files so can adjust image readily In editing. Avoid high contrast in bright sun because that camera can't cope and you will lose details in bright areas or shadows or both. HDR can deal with some of this (3 pics are taken with 3 different exposures, then averaged out. But this can lead to unpleasant artefacts so best just avoid bad lighting. However, for sunsets, it is almost necessary.
You might reduce bright sun on a subject by creating a shadow. The phone will be able to adjust to the darker tones to give a good exposure throughout. This is no good for a flighty bird or bug!!

Carmen mentioned thermal cameras, which are triggered by the presence of warm-blooded animals moving nearby. These are relatively cheap.

Tom was asked about what editing Apps he would recommend.

Tom often uses Flintstone Image Viewer because he can get a quick view/fast load, and do basic edits too. (Sounds like Preview). Or Snapseed. But he also uses Lightroom and Photoshop.

Note that iPhone 11 has a great camera.

C. From Carmen: Tips for taking iPhone bird pics or camera pics at home using your back deck or verandah, or balcony

1. **Supply a perch using a branch of timber**. To bring in the birds and create a photogenic 'scene'. This can be installed permanently, or propped up for the day. Use clamps or clips to hold things onto the branch - leaves, flowers, food.
2. **Plant native species in your garden**, to attract insects and birds. Check out the best species for you, at anps.com
3. **Supply permanent water**. This is very important. The water attracts insects as well as birds. The birds will drink, and also bathe. Use different-sized/depth dishes to suit a range of birds. Up 1 m in a tree, wide and low on the ground, hanging in a bush. Add a 'rescue' object for small creatures to climb upon and escape, if they fall in.
4. A light sheet at night is a great idea, attracting insects and their predators, which land on the sheet. UV light is particularly good, as more insects can see it, or strong white light. Lay the cloth on the ground as well - some insects drop down to the ground, or crawl up to the light. Leave the sheet out for at least 15-20 minutes to give time for more insects to find it.

Sunday 5th June is World Environment Day in 2022