



PHOTOGRAPHY MASTERCLASS

Professional wildlife photographer, MICHAEL SNEDIC, gets close to a reticent subject

Photographing a bird in its natural environment can be extremely rewarding but many wild birds fly off before you get anywhere near them. There are, however, other options you can try to get a photo of that elusive species...

The Barking Owl featured here was injured and being cared for by a professional bird-keeper as part of an education display. To be able to approach such a bird at close range makes it much easier for the budding photographer, but you still need to follow some basic techniques in order to get a great shot.

As it was quite dark, a bit of 'fill' flash was required, otherwise the low light could easily have caused a slow shutter speed. Hand-holding a lens with a slow shutter speed inevitably leads to a blurry image. A flash can help minimise this blur by adding extra light.

The external flash on my SLR was angled slightly, to minimise the 'red eye' effect. I used the TTL (through the lens) metering setting on the flash, which works out the exact amount of light needed to expose the bird correctly. To reduce overexposure from too much flash, I set the power of the flash to -3 and attached a diffuser to further reduce its power and soften the light thrown on the bird. This also stops any discomfort the bird might feel due to a bright flash going off. The best way to use flash with an SLR camera is to set your camera to M for manual and use a shutter speed of between 1/60th to 1/250th of a second. An ISO of 100 also stops any unwanted 'noise' (similar to grain in film).

I used an aperture (f-stop) of f6.3 for this image, for better depth-of-field. By using a slightly higher f-stop number (i.e. a smaller opening), the owl's eyes and beak were in focus, while still blurring out the background. I also positioned myself so that there were no distracting trees, poles or buildings behind the owl, which could have easily ruined the photo.

As always, patience is paramount and after much waiting I was lucky enough to capture the owl in this unusual head position. To me, this quote attributed to Thomas Jefferson sums it all up... "I'm a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work the more I have of it."

Michael Snedic is presenting a birding and bird photography workshop at Bowra Sanctuary in August 2013, with birding guide, Barry Davies. For more details, visit www.michaelsnedic.com

