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Understanding an animal's behaviour is valuable preparation for capturing a dramatic moment.

Little Egret

A male little egret in full breeding plumage races across the lily pads in a Brisbane pond. Occasionally he stops suddenly and fans his wings out. The reason for this seemingly strange manoeuvre is to create shade in order to clearly see any tiny fish that might be lurking below the water's surface.

I had already spent four mornings trying to photograph this bird and it was, at times, a frustrating process. Every time I lay down on the ground to be at eye-level to the egret, he would go to the other side of the pond. I'd pick up all my gear and reposition myself – and he would move somewhere else! After many hours of this each morning, my patience was wearing a tad thin, so it was with relief that I noticed he was letting me get quite close without running off. I guess he finally realised that I did not represent a threat to him.

I waited for what seemed an eternity, my right eye glued to the camera's viewfinder. I composed the shot so that the egret's bill was angled towards the bottom left-hand corner of the screen and focused on his eye. To blur out the background, I set the camera's f-stop (aperture) to f4 and

to freeze any movement, the shutter speed was 1/4000th of a second. Due to harsh lighting on the day, I changed the camera's exposure compensation setting to minus one and a half, to minimise over-exposing his white feathers.

Suddenly, he jabbed his bill deep into the water at lightning speed and it came back out with a flapping fish. This was my cue and I took a series of shots using the camera's continuous shutter setting. The little egret had captured his 'prize' and I had captured mine.

When photographing wildlife behaviour, patience, perseverance and lots of practice are recommended.

Happy photography!

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