



PHOTOGRAPHY MASTERCLASS

Professional wildlife photographer MICHAEL SNEDIC explains the nitty gritty of how to get that perfect shot.

When I heard through the grapevine that there was a Little Egret in full breeding plumage at a local Brisbane pond that had been seen fishing for hours on end, I knew it was time to get my camera out.

Over three days, I followed this bird around the pond with my camera and lens, hoping to get that elusive shot. I lay a poncho out on the ground, placed a beanbag on it, nestled my camera and zoom lens on top to minimise any camera shake, and waited. Often, just as I got into position on my stomach and was composing the shot, the hyperactive egret would move to another location within the pond. This happened repeatedly, and after three days, and having moved position well over one hundred times, my patience was wearing a tad thin.

Finally, on day four, the moment arrived! The egret stretched its wings out, speared the water with lightning speed and came out with a tiny fish. I was ready. Using aperture priority on my SLR (Single Lens Reflex), I had preset my aperture (f-stop) to f4, in order to blur out the background. This created a faster shutter speed, as did raising my ISO (light sensitivity) to 400. I set my focusing style to 'continuous' (or AI Servo for Canon users). When the egret moved, the camera's focusing point refocused on the moving bird (on the eye), as long as I followed it and kept my finger partially depressed on the shutter button. I used this in conjunction with the continuous shutter and captured a series of shots when the actual

'moment' arrived. Using my 80-200mm f2.8 lens at 1/4000th of a second, I was able to freeze the egret's movement perfectly.

When using aperture priority the camera's exposure changes depending on where you point your lens, as well as the lighting conditions at the time. Since the egret was white and it was a sunny day, I adjusted the exposure compensation setting on the camera to minus-one-and-one-third. This prevented the bird's feathers from over-exposing and losing detail.

Even though I had spent four mornings following this Little Egret around with my camera, with many near-misses, the resulting photo was worth every moment.

Michael Snedic is a professional wildlife photographer and tutor. For more details of Michael's photography workshops, please visit www.michaelsnedic.com

