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Not many wild animals allow photographers to get this close to their eyes but, with caution, respect and the right equipment, it is sometimes possible.

Tawny frogmouth

While driving back from a rainforest photo shoot on the outskirts of Brisbane, I noticed a tawny frogmouth by the side of the road, sitting on an old post, and immediately stopped to see if it was injured. I quickly realised that the bird, a nocturnal species, was simply roosting during the day. I gently moved my hand towards the tawny to see if there was any reaction but it didn't move a millimetre, so I went back to my 4WD to get my camera, macro lens and macro flash.

I approached the bird ever-so-cautiously and started composing my photo. Rather than a portrait shot of its whole body, which has been done many times before, I decided to concentrate on the bird's piercing golden eyes. I composed my photo to show only the face, with no background distractions. A manual focus ensured the eyes were pin-sharp.

I wanted as much of the tawny's face in focus as possible, including the beak, so using a very small aperture (large number) was my best option. Being so close to the bird's

face, I used an aperture of f32 to maximise depth of field. I was amazed at how still the bird remained while I took the photos.

When you come across wildlife opportunities such as this but the lighting is a bit dark and you don't have a flash, two options may help you achieve sharp shots. First, if the subject is completely still, I highly recommend a tripod. This reduces camera movement dramatically. If you are hand-holding your camera, the second option is to increase the camera's ISO setting. The higher the ISO, the faster your shutter speed and the less chance your shots will be blurry. Happy photography!

MICHAEL SNEDIC is a Brisbane-based nature photographer, writer and presenter of 'in-the-field' photography workshops throughout south-east Queensland and interstate.

www.michaelsnedic.com

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