

# How to Become a (Great) Nature Photographer: 9 Essential Tips

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**HOW TO  
BECOME A GREAT**

# BECOMING A GREAT NATURE PHOTOGRAPHER

Want to be a nature photographer? You're in the right place.

Becoming a great nature shooter isn't as hard as you might think. With the right tools, techniques, and approach, you can level up your camera skills, find amazing subjects, and have plenty of photographic fun along the way. And if you're really, *really* dedicated, you might even become a paid professional.

Below, I offer my top 9 tips for nature photography success – so if you're ready to capture stunning birds, wildlife, plants, and more, then let's dive right in!

## 1. Make sure you like it

Nature photography involves a lot of time and effort. You'll often spend long days in the field, only to head home empty-handed when the light doesn't cooperate, your subject doesn't cooperate, or you just can't seem to make the shot.

And even when things *do* go to plan and you get that perfect image, the scouting and traveling and waiting can be tough.

I'm not saying that you must be head-over-heels in love with nature photography from the get-go; over time, your passion may develop and you'll come to love certain elements of shooting that you previously found tedious.

But you should *like* nature photography, and you should be able to see yourself loving it as time goes on. In other words, to succeed as a nature shooter, passion and drive are essential.

## 2. Distinguish yourself

These days, nature photography is wildly popular. *Everyone* wants to shoot nature, and while it's great to have people across the globe appreciating the natural world, this brings with it a lot of competition.

So if you want to stand out from the crowd and attract the attention of magazines, you have to be different.

Think about your interests. Is there a specific type of subject – such as songbirds or bears – you could focus on? Think about your technical approach, too. Might you capture unique photos by using the light in an unconventional way? Could you use a focal length or a depth of field generally avoided by nature photographers?

I spend a huge amount of time photographing red squirrels, and my dedication has allowed me to capture behaviors like this:



### 3. Take risks

I don't mean that you should take physical risks; instead, be prepared to take risks with your time because, as the saying goes, "Nothing ventured, nothing gained."

As I mentioned earlier in the article, nature photography is rarely a sure thing. The light is difficult to predict, and subject behavior – if you like to photograph birds or wildlife – is even trickier to anticipate. You *will* strike out from time to time, and it'll be frustrating, but if you never take risks, you'll miss all the best shots!

So don't be afraid to plan nature photography trips, even if you're not sure about the light. Don't be afraid to check out new locations, even if you're not sure whether they'll pan out.

Recently, there was a display of the aurora borealis in the north of England. Typically, it's hard to predict this phenomenon, and available forecasts only look an hour ahead. The display can finish as quickly as it starts, so planning for such an event isn't really possible. I decided I wanted to capture the northern lights with a British castle in the foreground, but the structure I had in mind was over two hours away.

Nevertheless, at 2 AM, I dropped everything and raced off to the coast. When I arrived, the display was weakening, but after two hours of waiting, the lights erupted in front of me. I got home at 8 AM, but the image made it well worth the effort:



## 4. Always be ethical

Unfortunately, not all photographers are respectful of nature – but in my view, taking an ethical approach in your photography, *especially* when photographing animals, is of utmost importance.

You'll have a much better time shooting if you're not harming wildlife in the process. And there are reasons of self-interest to consider, too: Photographers who are unethical are shamed by others in the industry, and they lose the respect of the majority of photographers who care about their subjects.

No photo should come before the welfare of an animal or a place. It's that simple, and if you remember this rule, your photos will improve in the long run. The best photographers don't

cut corners, and they have a great affinity for the environment, too.



## 5. Think about what you want to express

Once you find a good subject, you may be tempted to simply press the shutter button – but if you click without thinking, you’ll often end up with boring photos.

Instead, upon finding a good subject, ask yourself: *What do I want to convey to the viewer? How can I make the viewer feel like they’re in my shoes?*

Then, once you realize what you’re after, adjust your gear, settings, composition, and lighting for the perfect result.



For instance, if you want to capture a dramatic, breathtaking landscape, you might deliberately pick a wide-angle lens, find a powerful foreground subject, and get down low so it looms large in the frame. That way, you'll get an image filled with astonishing depth and plenty of detail.

And if you want to capture a beautiful bird portrait, you should choose a long lens, get in close to fill the frame, carefully position the bird within the overall composition, and wait until the bird strikes an engaging pose.

## **6. Convey scale**

One of the toughest parts of nature photography is communicating the size of a subject, whether it's breathtakingly large (as in the case of a mountain, a tree, or an incredible sunset), or absolutely minuscule (as in the case of a bird, a flower, or an insect).

Fortunately, nature photographers use a nifty trick: They introduce well-known objects in the scene, which then act as points of reference for the viewer.

If you're shooting a huge mountain, for instance, you can adjust your framing to include a house at its base; if you're photographing a tiny frog, you can include a daisy in the background. (And if you ever struggle to find an object that works, you can always step into the photo yourself!)

For this next photo, I chose a location with a tree in the foreground, which helped convey the expanse of the sky:



## 7. Try a different lens



Once you've become a more seasoned nature photographer, you may find yourself taking the same type of shot over and over again. Fortunately, it's easy to break out of these creative ruts:

Simply swap lenses!

Grabbing a different lens will force you to experiment with new compositions, think about new approaches, and maybe capture something unique.

So if you're used to doing wide-angle photography, try bringing out that telephoto lens. And if you generally shoot with a super-telephoto, go wide-angle, or even consider using your macro lens for a completely different perspective.



## 8. Plan before you shoot

Nature *is* relatively unpredictable...

...but that's no excuse not to plan before each outing! Planning can help you:

- Determine where the sun will be when you arrive on location
- Increase your chances of finding wildlife
- Ensure you have the right gear for the job

Yes, it can be fun to head out on spontaneous photography excursions. But while there's nothing *wrong* with the occasional impromptu expedition, I encourage you to stop and think before each trip. Do location research, check the tide charts, and look at sunrise and sunset times.

That way, when you do arrive, you're more likely to capture that perfect, once-in-a-lifetime shot!

## 9. Don't give up

Becoming a serious nature photographer isn't impossible, but it's not super easy, either. (If it were, then *everyone* would be a nature photography phenom!)

Nature photography requires a lot of time, effort, and knowledge, and at points, you may want to throw in the towel.

But when you're feeling down, just remember the *good* times. Look at your past photos, and remind yourself why you chose nature photography in the first place.

Results don't come instantly, and it takes practice to achieve great images. But if you put in the required hours, then you'll eventually get great results.



## How to become a nature photographer: final words

Well, there you have it:

9 tips for becoming a top-notch nature shooter. Nature photography can be incredibly rewarding, and while it's not always easy, it's certainly worth pursuing.

So remember these tips, take a deep breath, and go become a nature photographer!

*Which of these tips do you plan to focus on first? And what kind of nature photographer do you hope to become? Share your thoughts in the comments below!*

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