



THE

LAST FRAME

May 2009

St. Albert Photo Club's Monthly Newsletter



Edmonton bird photographer Gerald Romanchuk with a Great Horned owl.

A Passion For Feather Photography

With the recent movement of people getting back to nature, bird watching organizations have seen their memberships grow.

As a matter of fact, this is exactly how local bird photographer Gerald Romanchuk became interested in birds -- he was actually a bird watcher before taking up photography.

He still finds many of his favourite bird images can only be captured by going out with bird banders affiliated with bird watching organizations.

Bird photography, however, offers obstacles dissimilar to any other type of nature photography.

First, it is almost imperative that serious bird photographers have a

very long telephoto lens, preferably something in excess of 300mm -- the longer, the better.

Photographing mammals generally requires a 200mm to 400mm lens.

Birds, however, are much smaller than mammals thus a frame filling image will logically demand a lens with greater magnification.

<p>JUNE COMPETITION Wrap-Up Dinner June 10th</p>	<p>JUNE GUEST SPEAKER None</p>	<p>Click here to access our website</p>	<p>SEPTEMBER GUEST SPEAKER TBA</p>	<p>SEPTEMBER COMPETITION Summer Project</p>
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For birds, you need all the focal length you can afford!

Gerald conducts about 90% of his avian photography with a Canon 500mm f/4 IS (Image Stabilized) lens mounted on a monopod.

Preferring to expose his images in his camera's aperture-priority automatic mode, he will resort to a manual exposure mode if the lighting remains consistent but the tonality of his backgrounds will be changing.

Without question the ideal lens for most avian photography is a 500mm or 600mm super-telephoto lens.

A 300mm f/2.8 offers good portability but is too short a focal length for birds.

A 400mm f/2.8 is big, heavy, and expensive, while only offering a modest focal length increase from a 300mm.

A 500mm f/4 is felt by many bird photographers to be the best compromise between reach and portability.

A 600mm f/4 is expensive, has limited portability, but is excellent for tripod use.



Common Terns

Using teleconverters will help you avoid the cost of longer lenses while still maintaining the close focusing distance of your lens.

In fact, most professional bird photographers using a 500mm or 600mm lens will employ a teleconverter periodically to extend the focal length as much as possible.

The cost of a super-telephoto lens in the 500mm-600mm range is prohibitive for most and is obviously not for everyone, with price not being the only deterrent.

A pro camera body with

a 600mm f/4 super-telephoto lens mounted on a sturdy tripod can top out at over 20 pounds, not making it easy to pack around all day.

Those little gremlins that ruin your images, such as camera shake, are multiplied several times over with super-telephoto lenses.

The slightest change in perspective when employing a long telephoto lens changes the background drastically.

Long lenses are also prone to blurring due to mirror flap, and these vibrations travel along

the lens causing problems with shutter speeds below 1/500-second.

Proper long lens technique suggests you to position your face snugly against the viewfinder and place your left hand on top of the lens during exposure to minimize if not eliminate vibration.

If there is anything in your image that is sharp, but your bird looks slightly "soft", you probably have a focusing problem.

Concentrate on exactly where you place your camera's autofocus bracket.

Try to get this on the bird's eye. If the eye isn't

<p>St. Albert Photo Club</p> <hr/> <p>Vol:8 Issue:8 PUBLISHED MONTHLY September - June</p>	<p>President</p> <p>Derald Lobay </p>	<p>Treasurer</p> <p>Allen Skoreyko </p>	<p>Web Master</p> <p>Tracey Guzak </p>	<p>Club Contact</p> <p>Doug Poon 973-7035  dougpoon@shaw.ca</p>
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Yellow-headed Blackbird

sharp, the photo won't make the mark.

However, if the eye is sharp, it is surprising how much "softness" you can get away with in the rest of the bird's body.

If the background is as blurred as the bird, the culprit is movement of your camera gear.

There are several options to solve this problem.

You can use a tripod, monopod, bean bag or some other improvised camera support to reduce camera movement.

You can practice your "long lens technique" (see above) with a gentle shutter release action.

Or you can use the lens' maximum aperture in combination with a higher

ISO setting so that you can increase your shutter speed to freeze the bird's movement.

With the exception of some waders or raptors, birds tend to be hyperactive, with movements that are much faster than most mammals.

The only way their actions can be frozen is by having shutter speeds of 1/500-second or faster, with 1/250-second being the absolute minimum shutter speed you should use.

A large aperture, such as f/2.8 to f/5.6, gives you shallow depth of field, allowing you to isolate the birds from the background.

It is great for keeping the focus on the bird. It

also lets in more light, which allows you to use faster shutter speeds.

A small aperture, such as f/16 to f/32, captures less light but increases your depth of field, which gives you the chance to take more of an "environmental portrait" of the bird in its habitat.

Many fail to realize at the time they are firing the shutter how small the subject really is in relation to their camera frame.

Birds are not only small but they are in most cases, a moving target.

Getting close enough to produce quality images is no small task.

People are the greatest threat to birds and wildlife, and the animals know it, so try not to be threat-

ening.

Movement represents a danger signal to birds.

Be patient and adopt a low profile.

Hiding close by in dense foliage works well.

If you remain still for several minutes after entering such an area, birds will soon return to their normal activity, often just feet away.

Avoid jerky motion or making any noises.

Find a promising area, slowly work in close, and wait.

The slow approach is a simple, basic approach that really does work.

With camera and lens mounted on your tripod, walk slowly towards your subject.

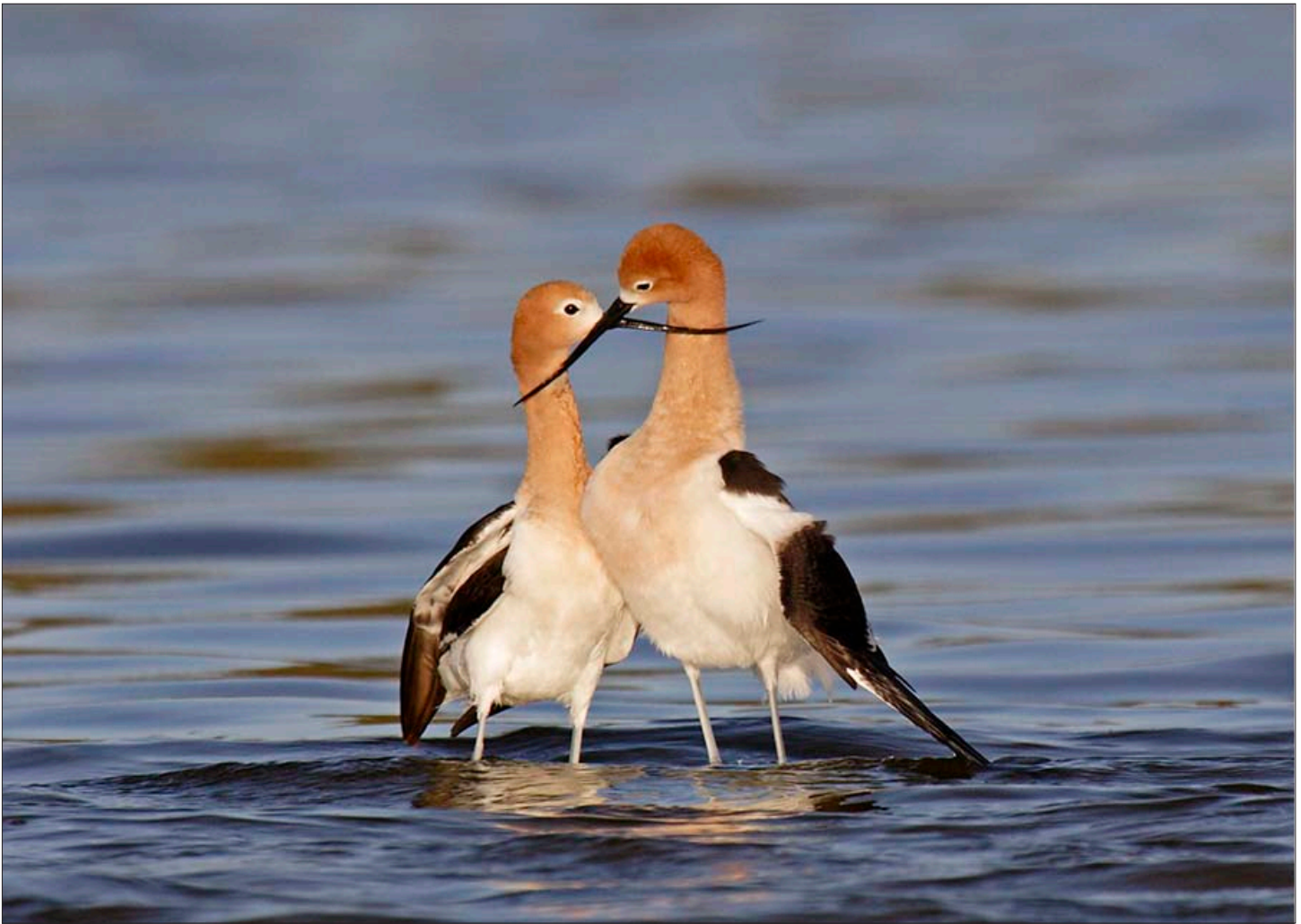
Take a few steps, pause, and then take a few more.

Slow down even more, as you get closer. And don't stare at the bird -- that's a behaviour trait of a predator and birds sense that.

Gerald also suggests trying to get as low as possible, to the same level as the bird's eye level, for a more intimate photograph.

Sometimes staying in one spot will yield better results than trying to go all over the place.

The ideal time to shoot outdoors is either early or late or on a slightly hazy day; shooting in harsh direct sunlight, from between 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. the light is too direct and the result is too



American Avocets

much contrast and washed out colour.

Just after sunrise and just before sunset, when the light is soft yet fully saturated is also when birds are most active, scurrying about to gather food.

It makes sense to study your quarry and know their biology, habits, travel patterns, and behaviour.

Gerald said you cannot underestimate the importance of accurate research.

It is immensely time-consuming, but essential to make sure that the right locations are chosen in the right season to maximize your chances of getting

the images that you desire.

The best time to photograph birds is in the spring during the nesting season when males acquire their colourful breeding plumage.

If the best time is spring, then the best place is a rookery or breeding ground.

A nice wetland or cattail marsh is a good place to just sit and observe bird behaviour.

Often yellow-headed blackbirds, red-winged blackbirds and marsh wrens can be spotted there.

Water is always a good attraction for birds. You

can also try locating a nest and also observing their behaviour.

Most cavity nesters feel safe being around some people.

Ground nesters, however, may move on once a person has left their scent on nearby vegetation, especially early in the season.

Knowing your subject can be the key to unlocking photographic opportunities that others overlook.

For example, birds frequently and repeatedly return to preferred perches, roosting sites, favoured feeding areas, or rainwater pools.

Even when flushed inadvertently, they come back to these spots.

So, when the bird flees from your approach, don't give up.

Since birds in many places tend to be skittish, it is not unusual for a photographer to work from inside a vehicle.

Turn your engine off to avoid camera shake caused by engine vibration before tripping your shutter.

During certain months of spring and fall be alert to the migrant species. They fly into an area weary and tired, badly in need of food and a rest.

These migratory birds can be great subjects to photograph.

They are often so intent on resting and ravenously feeding that they are oblivious to all else.

They will allow quite close approaches from anyone they perceive as non-threatening.

Look for birds so strongly focused on an activity that they don't notice what's going on around them.

It helps to sit down, observe the behaviour and think about the best route for your approach.

Preening, feeding, territorial displays, and bathing are all behaviours that keep birds very much preoccupied.

Blinds permit photographers the ability to photograph birds from an up-close vantage point.

They also afford photographers the rare experience of observing wildlife in a true natural state.

Nesting grounds, feed-

ing areas, and a grouse's "lek" are all places to use a blind.

Try to set up your blind before you begin your photography so that the birds will have some time to become accustomed to its presence.

Floating blinds work best on lakes or marshes of moderate to shallow depths and should not be used on windy days.

Not only do you run the risk of drifting out of control, but also the choppy waters will make it hard for you to get sharp images.

The most stable floating blinds are constructed of three donut-shaped layers of two-inch thick Styrofoam, topped with a 3/4-inch plywood platform, all bolted together.

This can then be topped off with a dome-shaped frame of PVC pipes, which is then covered with chicken wire.

Cattails and bulrushes or camouflage material is

then draped over the exterior.

Digiscoping is bird photography marrying a digital camera with a spotting scope.

The whole setup is then mounted on a tripod.

A cable release is a must as digiscopes can achieve a range up to 3000mm or more and the slightest vibration will give you a blurry image.

The disadvantages of digiscoping are lower image quality (as compared to a DSLR and super telephoto lenses) and the slow lens (f/11 or more at a fixed aperture).

While there are some challenges to digiscoping, most notably tracking an active subject, they can be a significant initial investment advantage.

Consideration of the bird's well being should be of utmost concern to any bird photographer.

Birds are particularly vulnerable and weak during their migratory

period, spring and fall, during which they are travelling extremely long distances, exhausting them nearly to the point of death, and stopping off only to rest, refuel, and move on.

Treat these birds with respect and caution.

Leave nests and surrounding plants alone, otherwise you may cause the adult birds to desert the area.

Trampling nearby plants may make nests visible to predators, and your scent may guide predators to the nests.

Leave family groups of waterfowl, grouse, and ptarmigan together.

The lost young will fall prey to predators or starve.

Over the past 20 years, there have been three big players in the bird photography field -- Thomas Mangelson, Art Morris, and Moose Peterson.

Gerald Romanchuk should be added this list.

Article-Derald Lobay

Changing Times

After having done this monthly newsletter for the past several years, Jim Herchak has stepped up and will be the new newsletter editor, paginator, etc., starting with the 2009-10 season.

Club president, Derald Lobay, is being replaced by Mark Pesklewis as the new club president. Mark has a new vision for the club with more emphasis on workshops.

Allen Skoreyko is stepping aside as treasurer and bring the 'digital stuff'. Peyton Sibilleau will be taking over. Peyton and Loney Dickson will also handle the digital clips which were handled by Allen Skoreyko and Sieg Koslowski.

Tracey Guzak is continuing as the web master. The club has space available for members who wish to have a gallery on the web. The space is free for members

and is under utilized as is the 'buy/sell/trade' page.

Remember, June's year end banquet is the time we choose our themes for the next year. Have your 'themes' ready. Personally, I think the theme should be specific to the point and not generic. This should provide you with a point of photography that you may not have considered to help you improve your photographic skills.

Final Club Point Standings

PRINTS

- 23 - Al Popil
- 10 - Josh Forsyth
- 06 - Sieg Koslowski
- 03 - Derald Lobay
- 02 - Mark Pesklewis
- 02 - Heidi Ferguson
- 01 - Tim Johnston
- 01 - Tracey Guzak

DIGITAL

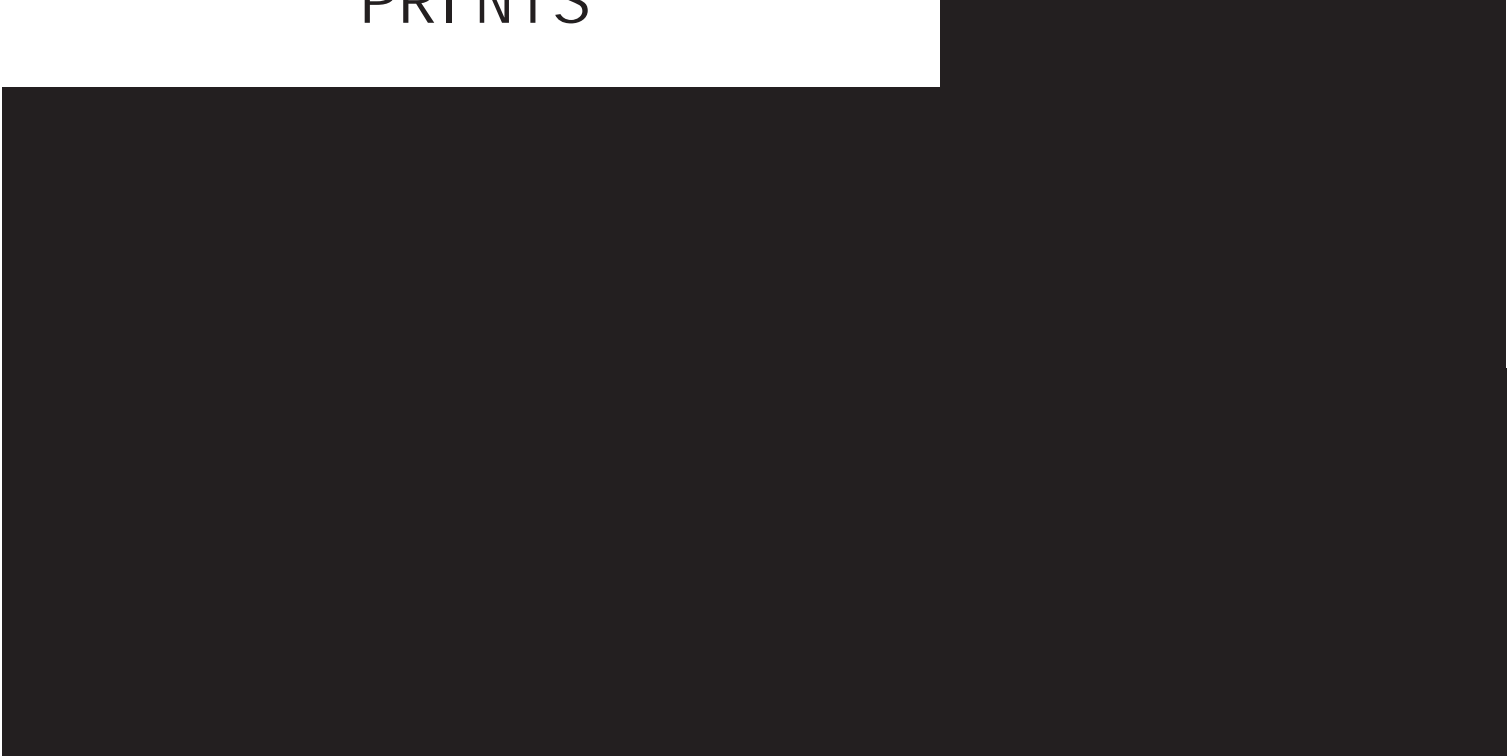
- 20 - Sieg Koslowski
- 08 - Al Popil
- 05 - Josh Forsyth
- 05 - Derald Lobay
- 04 - Mark Pesklewis
- 04 - Mark Shalanski
- 02 - Andrew McLeod

THE LAST FRAME

CLUB MEMBERS WINNING MONTHLY PICTURES



PRINTS



Above, 1st Place Print - Al Popil, top right, 2nd Place Print - Heidi Ferguson, right, 3rd Place Print - Derald Lobay

DIGITAL



2nd Place Digital -
Mark Shalanski

3rd Place Digital -
Sieg Koslowski