Great bird shots, Right?
Gear + Skill
Access
Great Light

Great bird shots, Right?
Good subject, poor lighting
Great Light

Technique

Location

Gear

Clean Backgrounds

Great bird shots, Right?
Distracting background!
Good subject, well lit, clean background
Interesting Behavior
Clean Backgrounds
Location
Great Light
Technique
Great bird shots!
Spoonbill in Flight—Merritt Island, FL

ISO 400, 1/3200 sec. f6.3  500mm
Preferred:
• Camera with a 300mm lens minimum.

• Camera capable of focus tracking is desireable. Focus tracking locks focus on moving subjects. (AI-Servo mode in Canon; AF-C on Nikon—most DSLR’s have this).

• Camera with high write speed (frames per second).

My Equipment:
• Canon 5D MkIII and Canon 7D Mk II

• Canon 500 MM f4 L IS with a 1.4 extender =700mm on the full frame and 1,120mm on the 7D Mk II (crop sensor).

• Canon 100-400 f4.5-5.6 Version II.
Sometimes, TOO much lens can be a problem!
Technique

Camera Settings

Lens Settings

Tracking

Bird Behavior
Camera Settings

Something’s Gotta Give!

Shutter Speed:

Aperture:

ISO:
My Preferred Setting for Birds in Flight: Manual Mode with Auto ISO—Program “Set” button to activate Exposure Compensation

- Auto ISO
- Shutter speed at 1/1600 to 1/2400 second
- Aperture at f 5.6 to 9. (To blur background)
Camera Settings

- **Focus tracking AI-Servo focus mode** (Canon). (AF-C for Nikon)
- **High speed shutter burst.** (Make sure your card has a high write speed.)
- **Back-button focusing**—separates the shutter from the focus function.
Camera Settings

• Use center cluster focus point.

• Evaluative metering

• Exposure compensation (For example, -1 for egrets; +1 for glossy ibis. if you have the time to adjust)

• EXPOSE TO THE RIGHT—but be careful. Egrets and white ibis can be VERY bright in the sun!
HIGH ISO SETTINGS REQUIRE EXPOSING TO THE RIGHT!

Especially with dark subjects

In an underexposed shot captured at a high ISO, shadow recovery will reveal tons of noise.

Darker birds—such as eagles and glossy ibis—are a special challenge, especially in overcast skies.
ETTR solves Noise!
Lens Settings

• Limit focus range for quicker focusing.

• Auto focus on.

• Image Stabilization on.

• Choose Stabilizer mode.
GOALS
(IN AN IDEAL WORLD)

• Fill the frame with the bird
• Shutter speed of 1/1600 to 1/2400 sec.
• Aperture of f8 or f9
• ISO no higher than 800
• Perfect focus on the bird’s eye
• Exposed to the right of the histogram
TRACKING BIRDS IN FLIGHT

Takes practice!

The following sequence of shots is uncropped, and show my attempt to track an incoming snowy egret.

Canon 7D MkII, 100-400 zoom (at 400mm)
Tracking

Tips:

Keeping both eyes open helps in tracking.

Release the shutter (high speed mode) in short bursts.
Pay attention to bird behavior

- Notice repetitive behavior, like nest building or favorite perches.
- If they crap, they’re about to fly.
- They generally take off into the wind.
When it comes to good birding locations, “When?” is a much more important question than “Where?”
Florida has hundreds of great birding locations, but they’re not all good all the time.

Alligator Farm is a fantastic location in April, but lousy in July.

Venice Rookery is great in January, but not in June.

Go to any location, talk to naturalists, talk to photographers, and find what locations have been good recently.
I have found photographers in every location I’ve visited who are quite friendly and willing to share information.
Location

- Good bird traffic
- Elevated
- Sun to your back
Celery Fields, Sarasota, Florida

My Favorite Spot

East
• To avoid unwanted harsh shadows, photograph when the sun is low in the sky—in the morning or late afternoon.

• Be aware of where the sun is, and keep it to your back. Your shadow should point toward the subject.
A great bird photograph is free of distracting background elements.

• Photographing birds in flight often solves the background problem. The sky is a pretty clean background!

• Keeping aperture at f7.1-f9 helps achieve a clean background.
Limpkin in Flight

ISO 1000, 1/2000 sec. f9  500mm +1.4 ext.
Limpkin in Flight
ISO 640, 1/1250 sec. f9 500mm +1.4 ext.
If you’ve attended to controlling attitude, access, lighting, backgrounds, and equipment, then you’re all set for luck to happen.

- Flight
- Interaction with water
- Nest building
- Capturing prey
Sandhill Crane—Celery Fields, FL
ISO 640, 1/2500 sec. f9  700mm
Sandhill Crane Pair—Celery Fields, FL
ISO 640, 1/2500 sec. f9  700mm
Mottled, or “Muddled,” Ducks—Celery Fields, FL

ISO 800, 1/3200 sec. f9  700mm
Osprey in Flight-Celery Fields
ISO 800, 1/1250 sec. f9  400mm
Pelican—Celery Fields, FL
ISO 1000, 1/5000 sec. f9  400mm
Red-Shouldered Hawk—Celery Fields, FL
ISO 1250, 1/5000 sec. f8  700mm
Wood Stork, Celery Fields, FL

ISO 640, 1/4000 sec. f9  700mm
Blue Heron—Celery Fields, FL
ISO 800, 1/2500 sec. f9  700mm
Juvenile Spoonbill—Merritt Island, FL
ISO 400, 1/5000 sec. f6.3  500mm
Anhinga—Celery Fields, FL
ISO 500, 1/2000 sec. f9   700mm
Roseate Spoonbill—Merritt Island, FL
ISO 400, 1/3200 sec. f6.3  500mm
Reddish Egret—Merritt Island, FL

ISO 200, 1/2000 sec. f5.6  500mm
Black-Crowned Night Heron—Venice Rookery

ISO 400, 1/1600 sec. f6.3  400mm
Great Egret—Venice Rookery
ISO 200, 1/1600 sec. f6.3  400mm
Great Egret Nest Building—Alligator Farm
ISO 200, 1/1250 sec. f5.6  330mm
Osprey with Catfish—Celery Fields, FL
ISO 250, 1/1250 sec. f9  700mm
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How many of these aspects are controllable?
How many of these aspects are controllable?
• Bird photography is like fishing: You have to enjoy it whether or not you catch anything.