



# **FLORIDA BIRDS IN FLIGHT**

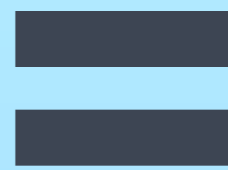
*DAN LANDIS*

**Gear**



**Technique**

**Location**



**Great bird shots,  
Right?**

**Gear**



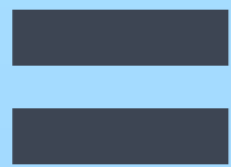
**Technique**



**Location**



**Great Light**



**Great bird shots,  
Right?**



**Good subject, poor lighting**

**Gear**



**Technique**



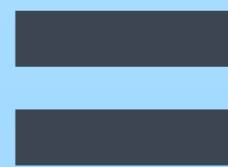
**Location**



**Great Light**



**Clean  
Backgrounds**



**Great bird shots,  
Right?**



**Distracting  
background!**







**Good subject,  
well lit,  
clean background**

**Gear**



**Technique**



**Location**



**Great Light**



**Clean  
Backgrounds**



**Interesting  
Behavior**



**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 desirable. 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:**



# Camera Settings

**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)

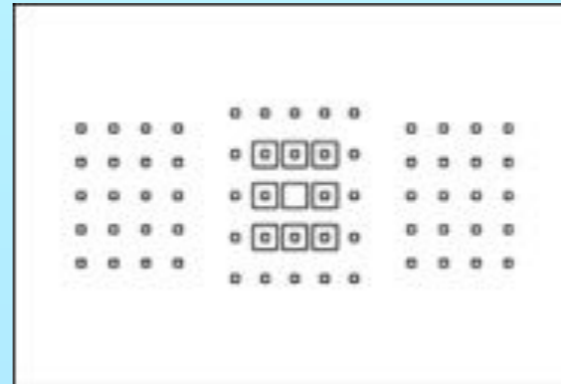
# Camera Settings



- **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!

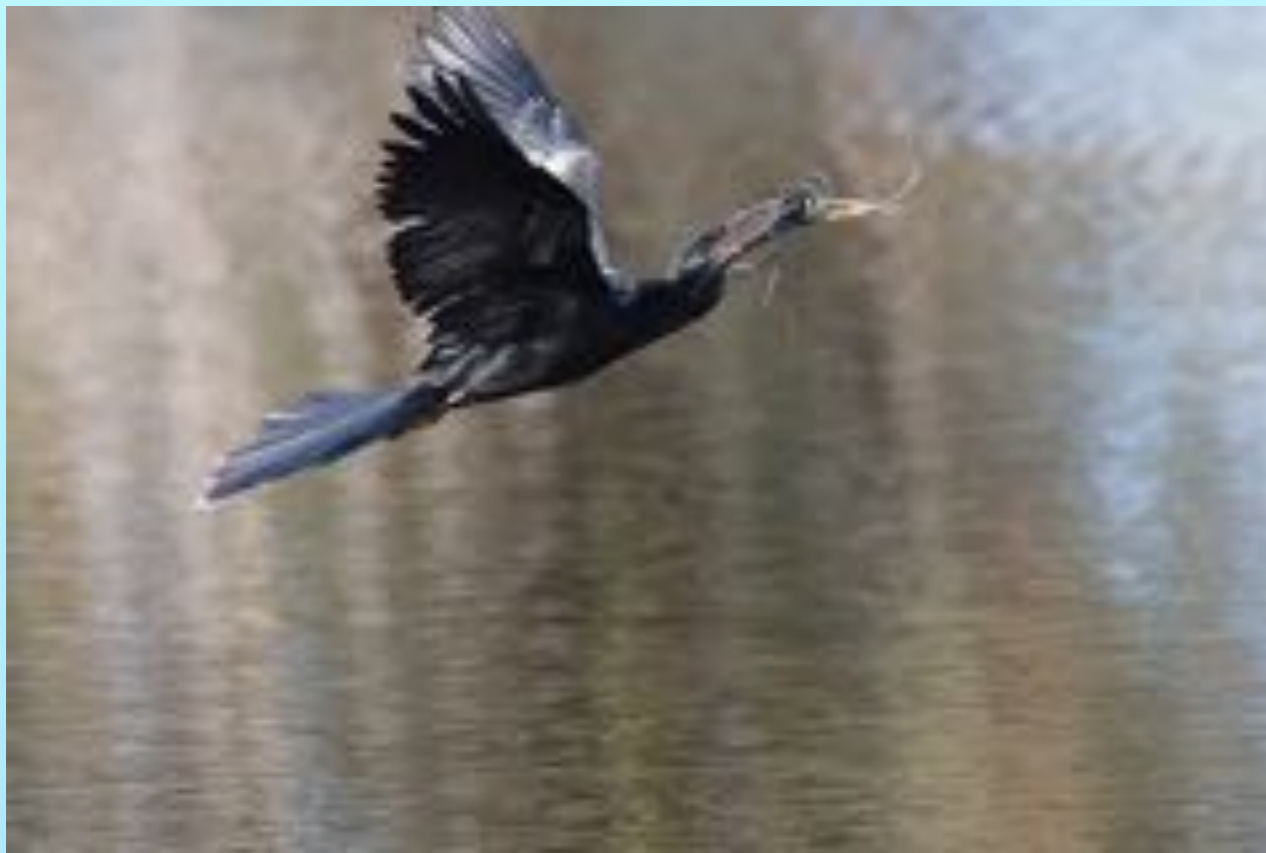
# Camera Settings

**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.

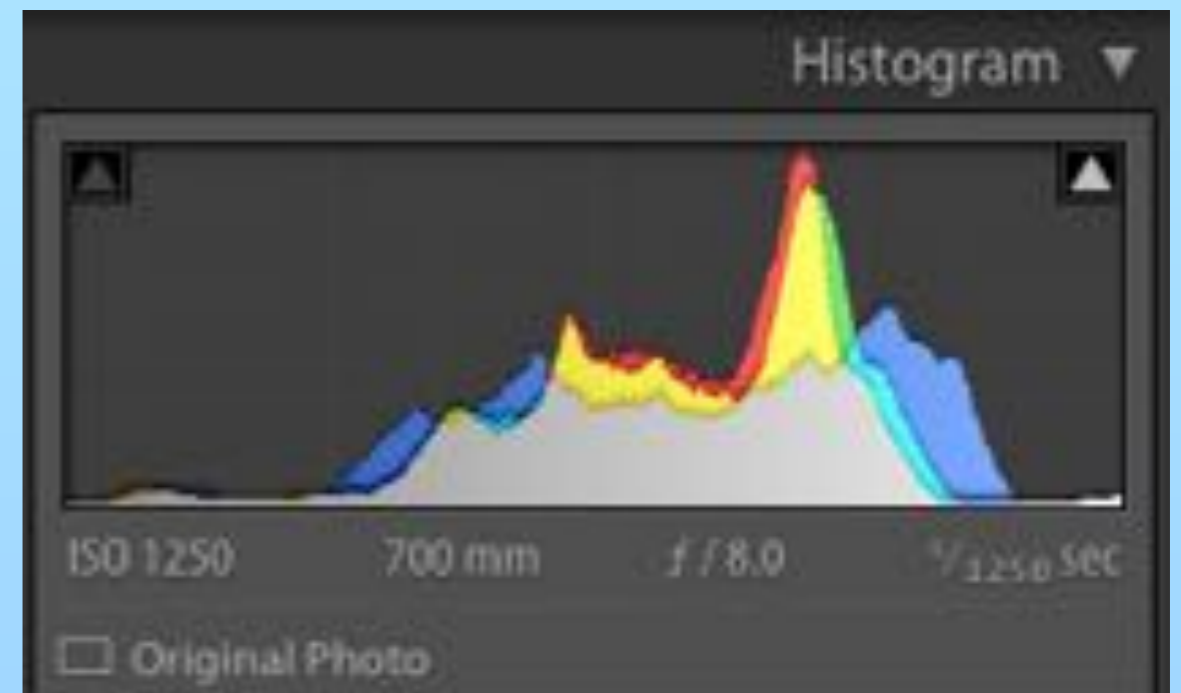
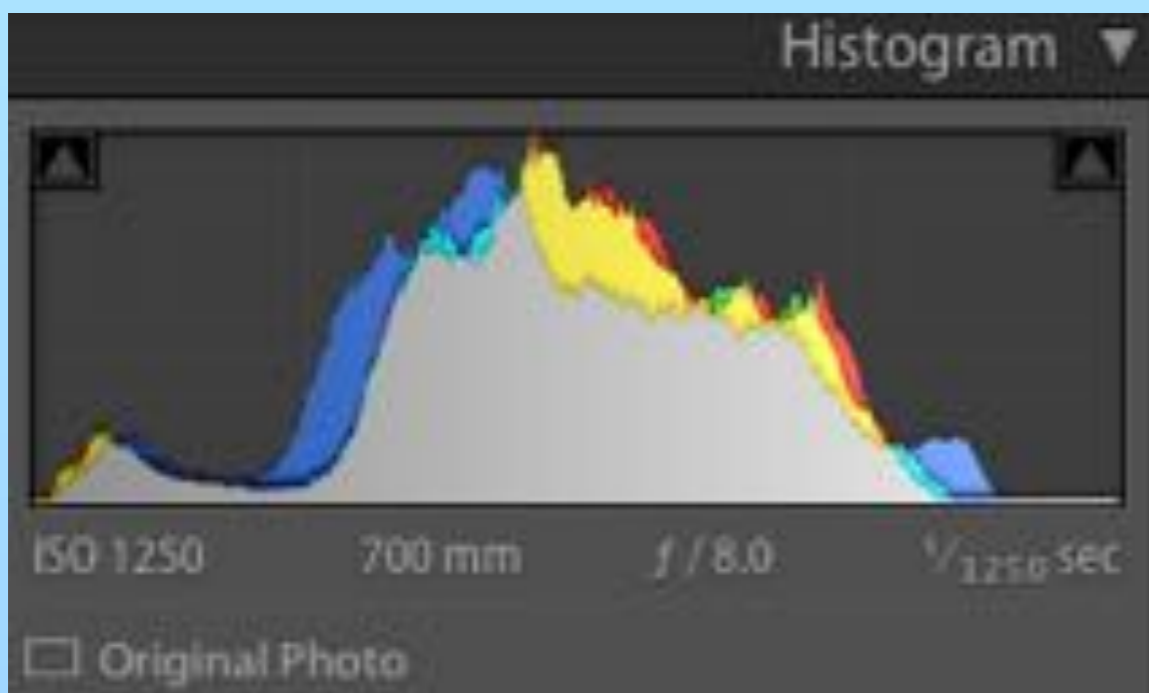
Darker birds—such as eagles and glossy ibis—are a special challenge, especially in overcast skies.



**ISO 1250**



**ISO 1250**







**Not ETTR**



**ETTR**

**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

## 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.**

# Bird Behavior

## **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?”**

# Location

**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







Chap.  
4

# Great Light

- 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.**

# Clean Backgrounds

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.



# Interesting Behavior

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



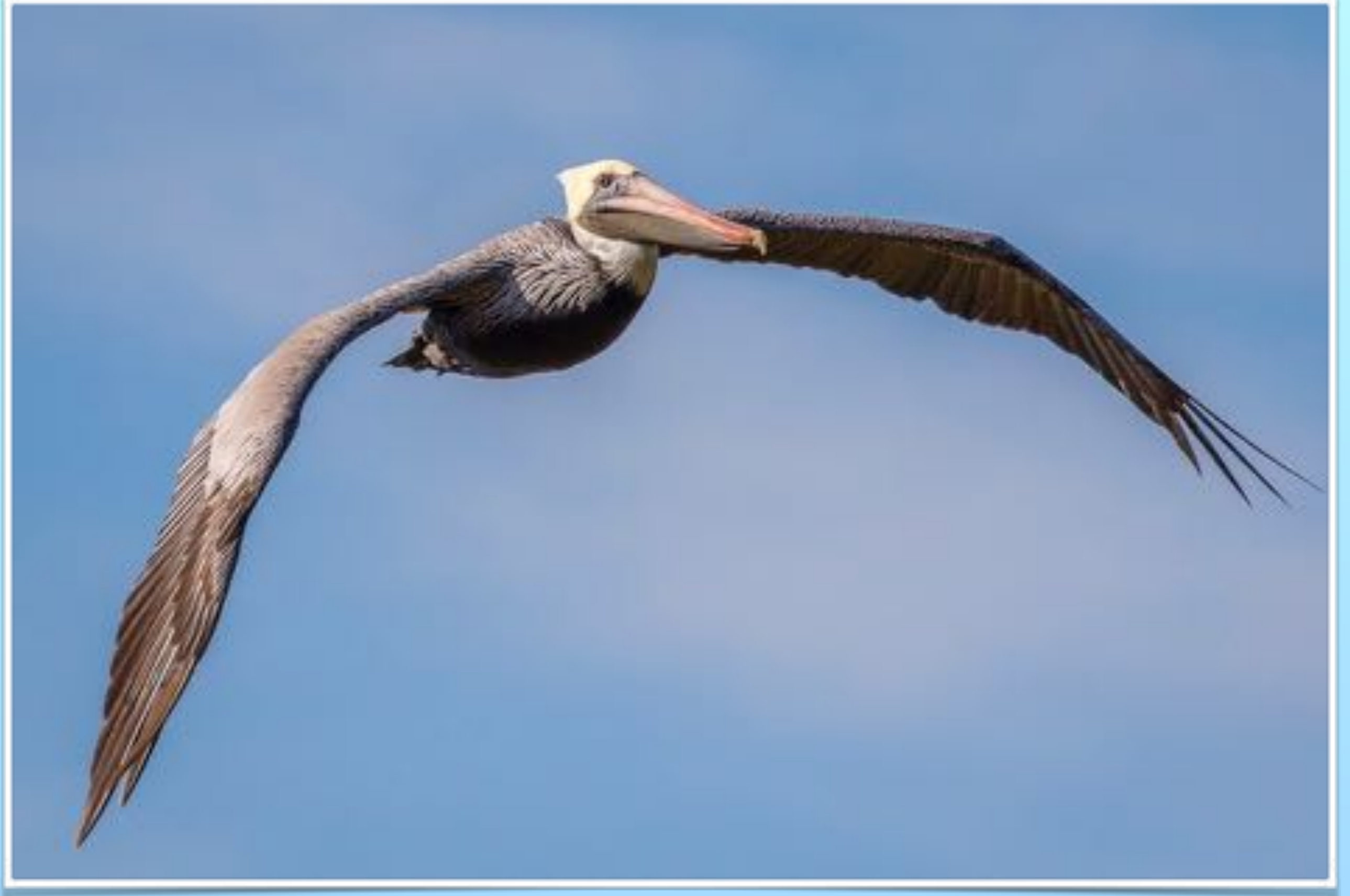
**Mottled, or “Muddled,” Ducks—Celery Fields, FL**

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





**Egret Landing—Alligator Farm, FL**

ISO 200, 1/5000 sec. f5.6 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

**Gear**

Budget

**Technique**

Practice  
and Study

**Location**

Access to BIF

**Great Light**

Positioning and  
Timing

**Clean  
Backgrounds**

Be Aware

**Interesting  
Behavior**

Luck!

How many  
of these  
aspects are  
controllable?



**Gear**

**Skill**

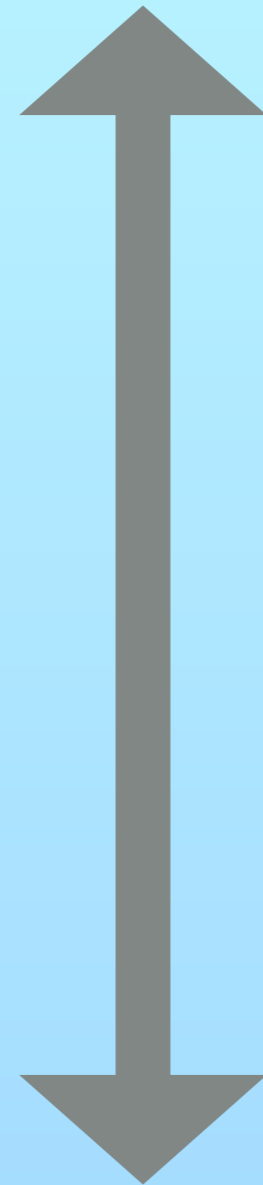
**Location**

**Great Light**

**Clean  
Backgrounds**

**Interesting  
Behavior**

**More  
Controllable**



**Less  
Controllable**

How many  
of these  
aspects are  
controllable?

# Attitude

- Bird photography is like fishing: You have to enjoy it whether or not you catch anything.