

12 Wildlife Photography Tips for Beginners



American white pelicans at Two Rivers NWR/USFWS

1. Plan ahead- Check local wildlife sighting reports or phenology calendars to learn what animals are active right now. Good resources are eBird or a phenology calendar. Don't forget to check the weather, you can still photograph and have a good time on a cool or rainy day just be prepared with extra layers.

- 2. Take your time-** Sometimes to get the best photo you need to spend some time in the outdoors searching for the wildlife or waiting for them to come by.
- 3. Be still-** Some wildlife won't mind if you are talking or moving around, for others it is best to find a place where you can sit quietly until they feel it's ok to come around. On the same note, a tripod can help make sure your photos are crisp and clear. Don't have a tripod? Lean against your vehicle, a bench or a tree to steady your hand.
- 4. Be safe-** Be careful when exploring a new area. Ask for maps and safety concerns at a ranger station or call ahead. Use flashing lights on your vehicle and wear bright colors if you plan to pull over for a photo.
- 5. Don't chase the wildlife-** Animals are skeptical of humans. If you spot something walk slowly to get a closer photo. If you try to run up to it the animal will just fly or run away and you've lost your chance.

6. **Be in the moment**- The photos you bring back can be a great way to share your experience but remember to have the experience. Take in the scene, the scents and the sounds of the day.
7. **Go in a pack**- Going outdoors with friends and family is a great way to ensure a good experience even if the wildlife doesn't cooperate. Share in the joy of spending time with others. Bringing others along will also ensure your safety.
8. **Know your equipment**- To get the best photos do some research or even take a course to learn how to best use your equipment.
9. **Lights, camera, action**- Practicing at home in different lighting is very helpful. Get to know your flash and when to use it, although it's best to take advantage of natural light.
10. **Get down to eye level**- Getting on the same level as your subject will make it more prominent and reduce the need for zoom.
11. **Focus on different objects**- Try leaving things in the foreground out of focus or the opposite for added artistic attention.
12. **Keep trying**- you might need to take several (hundred) photos to get the right one. That's the beauty of digital photography, one photo or 500 will cost the same. Just make sure you have enough space on your camera card or cell phone.



Moth at Two Rivers NWR/USFWS

Additional resources:

www.thesca.org/9-tips-taking-brilliant-nature-photos-your-smart-phone

www.bbc.co.uk/nature/22115362

Tips provided by:

**Two Rivers National Wildlife Refuge
Brussels, IL**

618-883-2524

www.fws.gov/refuge/two_rivers/