



# Tips for photographing birds in your garden

By HF Leader Dan Ransley

- **Tip 1 - Anticipation**

Garden birds are often small & fast moving. Following them through a long camera lens can be difficult. Watch their behaviour and learn to anticipate where they'll be - that way you can have your camera pointed at the right spot & wait for them to come into the frame. Perhaps hide some food in a crack - then sit back and wait for the birds to come to you!

- **Tip 2 - Background**

A nice background can make all the difference for an otherwise plain wildlife photo. Try avoiding hedges or greenhouses in the garden and find an angle that uses the blossom of nearby trees to create a beautiful soft pastel background - combined with the bold colours of the bird, this will result in a great shot.

- **Tip 3 - Shutter Speed**

Even when they're perched, garden birds are almost always moving - bobbing and twitching, which means you need a high shutter speed to get a nice crisp photo. Generally speaking, the smaller the bird, the quicker the twitching! For UK garden birds, aim to use a shutter speed of 1/800s or faster to prevent motion blur even though they're perched.

- **Tip 4 - Composition**

Wildlife photography isn't just about finding an animal and taking a well focused picture - the images that stand out are those that have been carefully composed. Frame the bird, introduce some colour to the image, and provide some environmental context. Many photography enthusiasts are too intent on capturing a portrait image of an animal, and they miss the rest of the natural world the subject lives in and is a part of.

- **Tip 5 - The Eyes Have It**

Getting on the same level as your subject can make for a much more inviting image - so get down to eye level! Perhaps by lying on the ground with your camera resting on a beanbag. It's also worth remembering that with wildlife photography, as long as the animal's eye is in focus it often doesn't matter if the rest of the image is not sharp - blurred fore/background or even wingtips can help concentrate the viewer's attention on the subject.

- **Tip 6 - Build Your Outdoor Studio**

Starting to feel like you've exhausted the possibilities for nice compositions in your garden? Get creative! Move things around, experiment with different perches/background/props/etc. Use an inch deep dish of water to provide a reflection, pile some old moss along the edge & put some bird food in it to tempt down the birds.

- **Tip 7 - Field Craft**

You can still feel like an intrepid wildlife photographer stalking your subject, even within the confines of your back garden! Patience, quiet & stillness are three of the most effective tools any wildlife photographer can have - enjoy spending time in your garden, watch & learn the behaviour of the birds, and wait for the photograph to present itself to you. You'll be rewarded with closer encounters & more natural behaviour.

Meet the Leader: Dan lives on the Lizard peninsula in southwest Cornwall, from where he runs photography workshops & private tuition sessions. He combines an enthusiasm for local history & nature with a love of creativity & extensive teaching experience to support clients seeking to improve their photography, from outright beginners through to accomplished professionals. His images have been used by many organisations worldwide, including major news networks & conservation charities.