

Wild at the Zoo!

Capturing Nature's Wonders

Flagpole Photographers Leaders and Learners

Chane & Rhonda Cullens

FlagpolePhotographers.com/programs/Zoo-Photography



Objectives for Leaders and Learners Zoo Photos

Understand	Understand key techniques for zoo photography.
Learn	Learn how to capture photos suitable for nature or other competitions in a zoo setting.
Practice	Practice zoo photography skills in field trips.
Gain	Gain confidence in photographing animals in captivity and in the wild.

Foundations of Zoo Photography

Flagpole's Nature
Competition Rules

What Makes Zoo
Photography Unique?

Composition Techniques
in Zoo Settings

Camera Settings

Q&A





Flagpole Photographers Nature Rules

Depicts our world without any sign of human-made artifacts.

- Editing must maintain a natural look, and adding elements is not allowed. Also, borders are not allowed.
- Banded or tagged animals are allowed. However, tame or wild domesticated animals are not allowed.

A Few Zoo Photos That Won Awards



ISO 3200, f/5.6, 1/125, 371 mm

Monochrome



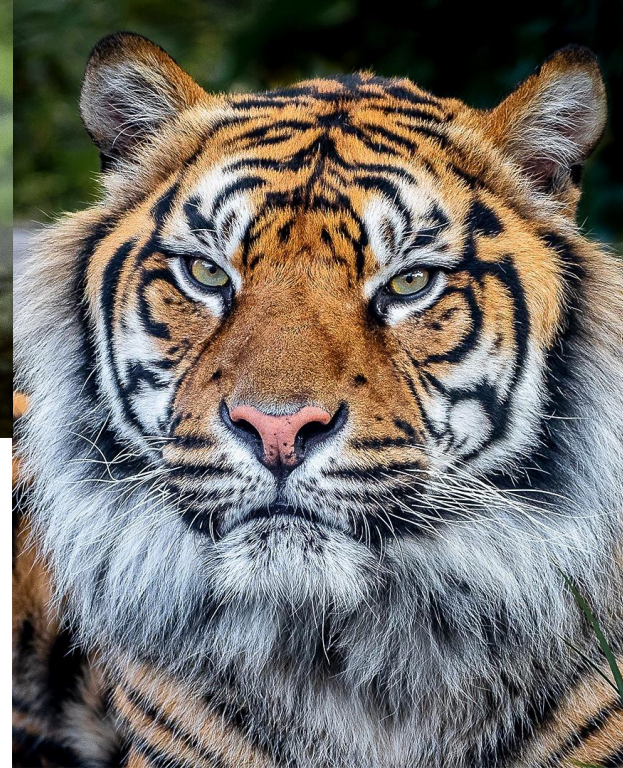
ISO 800, f/5.6, 1/400, 159 mm

Monochrome



ISO 2000, f/5.6, 1/320, 400 mm

Nature



ISO 800, f/7.1, 1/160, 214 mm

Color

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Zoos Are a Fantastic & Unique Opportunity to Capture Amazing Photos

It's like an around the world safari in one day!

Bronx Zoo

Africa

African Wild Dog: Sub-Saharan Africa
African Lion: Africa, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa
Angolan Colobus Monkey: Central Africa
Baboon (Hamadryas, Gelada): Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia
Black and White Colobus Monkey: Central and East Africa
Cheetah: Africa, Iran
Congo Peafowl: Congo Basin
Dromedary Camel: North Africa, Middle East
Egyptian Vulture: Southern Europe, North Africa, India
Fennec Fox: North Africa, Sahara Desert
Giraffe: Sub-Saharan Africa
Gorilla (Western Lowland): Central Africa
Grevy's Zebra: Kenya, Ethiopia
Hartmann's Mountain Zebra: South-western Africa
Kihansi Spray Toad: Tanzania
King Vulture: Mexico to Argentina (though King Vultures are New World Vultures, they are often found in African themed exhibits in zoos)
Lion-tailed Macaque: India (though sometimes found in African exhibits due to habitat similarities)
Naked Mole Rat: East Africa
Nile Crocodile: Africa
Nubian Ibex: Middle East, North Africa
Okapi: Congo rainforest

Red River Hog: West and Central Africa
Rock Hyrax: Africa, Middle East
Ring-tailed Lemur: Madagascar
Radiated Tortoise: Madagascar
Saddle-billed Stork: Sub-Saharan Africa
Speke's Gazelle: Horn of Africa
Spur-thighed Tortoise: North Africa, Middle East, Southern Europe
Thomson's Gazelle: Tanzania, Kenya, Sudan
White Rhinoceros: Southern Africa
Asia
Asian Brown Bear: Middle East, Central Asia, Siberia, China, India
Asian Elephant: Southeast Asia, India, Sri Lanka
Bactrian Camel: Central Asia
Chinese Alligator: China
Indian Rhinoceros: India, Nepal
Komodo Dragon: Indonesian Islands
Malayan Tapir: Southeast Asia
Pallas's Cat: Central Asia
Red Panda: Himalayas, Nepal, India, Bhutan, China, Myanmar
Red-crowned Crane: East Asia
Rhinoceros Hornbill: Southeast Asia
Ring-tailed Mongoose: Madagascar (though sometimes found in Asian exhibits due to habitat similarities)

Snow Leopard: Central Asia, Himalayas
Snowy Owl: Arctic regions of North America and Eurasia
Sumatran Orangutan: Indonesia, Sumatra
Sumatran Rhinoceros: Indonesia, Sumatra, Borneo
Turkmenian Markhor: Central Asia
White-naped Crane: East Asia
North America
American Bison: North America
Bald Eagle: North America
California Condor: Western North America
North American River Otter: North America
Wild Turkey: North America
South America
Andean Condor: South America, Andes Mountains
Chilean Flamingo: South America, Andes Mountains
Giant Anteater: South America
Prehensile-tailed Porcupine: South and Central America
Puma (Cougar/Mountain Lion): Americas (from Canada to the Andes)
Southern Tamandua: South and Central America
Australia/Oceania
Matschie's Tree Kangaroo: Papua New Guinea, Australia (limited range in far northern Australia)

Zoo Visits – New Opportunities at Every One!

Chane & Rhonda's zoo adventures over the last decade.



Visit indoor and outdoor exhibits at the Zoo



ISO 500, f/5.0, 1/1000, 234 mm



ISO 400, f/8.0, 1/800, 200 mm



ISO 125, f/3.5, 1/2500, 70 mm



ISO 500, f/4.5, 1/80, 155 mm

There Are Many Unique Birds Inside



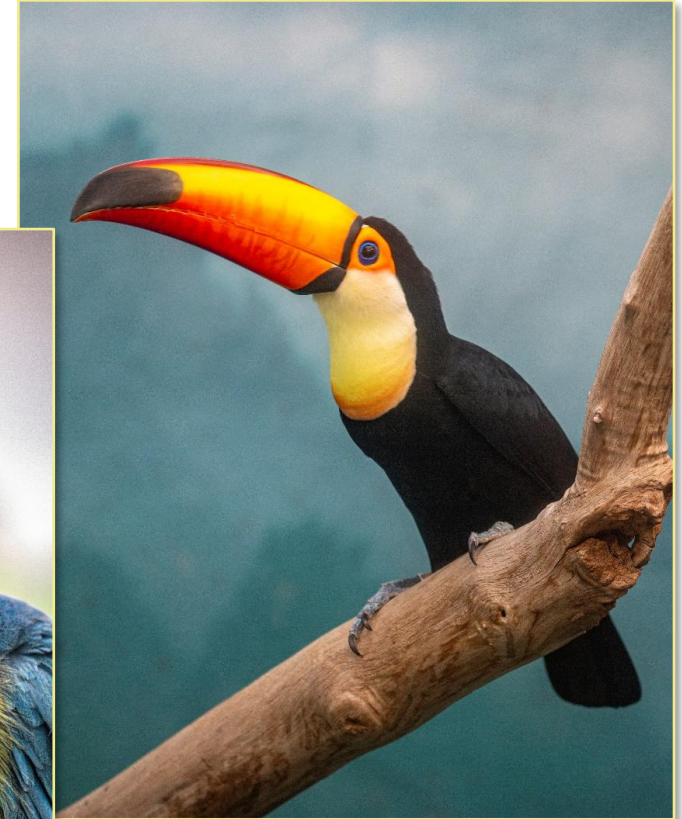
ISO 2500, f/5.6, 1/80, 321 mm



ISO 3200, f/5.6, 1/250,
400 mm



ISO 500, f/5.6, 1/100,
340 mm



ISO 500, f/5.0, 1/160, 214 mm

And Some More Common Birds Outside



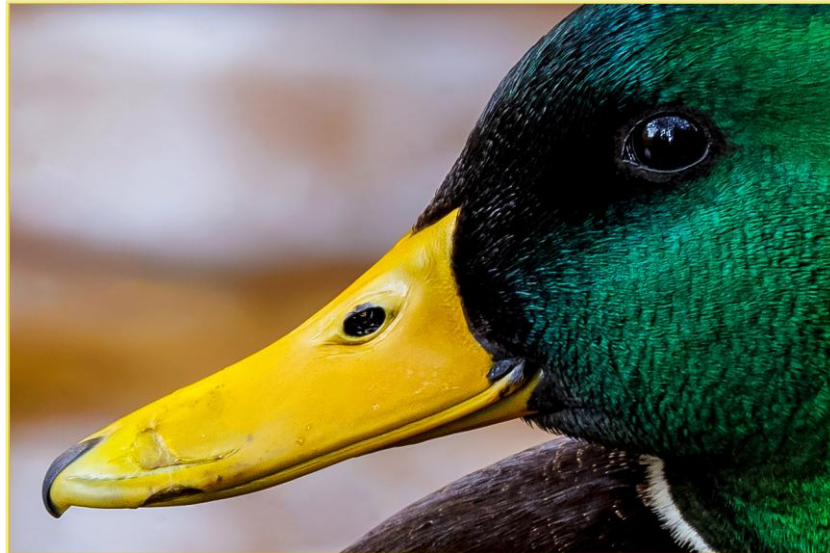
ISO 2000, f/6.3, 1/500 s, 182 mm



ISO 3200, f/7.0, 1/640 s, 500 mm



ISO 2000, f/7.1, 1/500 s, 135 mm



ISO 800, f/8.0, 1/60 s, 270 mm



ISO 1000, f/5.6, 1/800 s, 324 mm



ISO 800, f/8.0, 1/160s, 270 mm



ISO 400, f/7.1, 0.8 s, 46 mm

Look For Other Photo Opportunities Too!

Zoos Also Have Countless Photo Challenges

Cages

Fences

Glass

Backgrounds

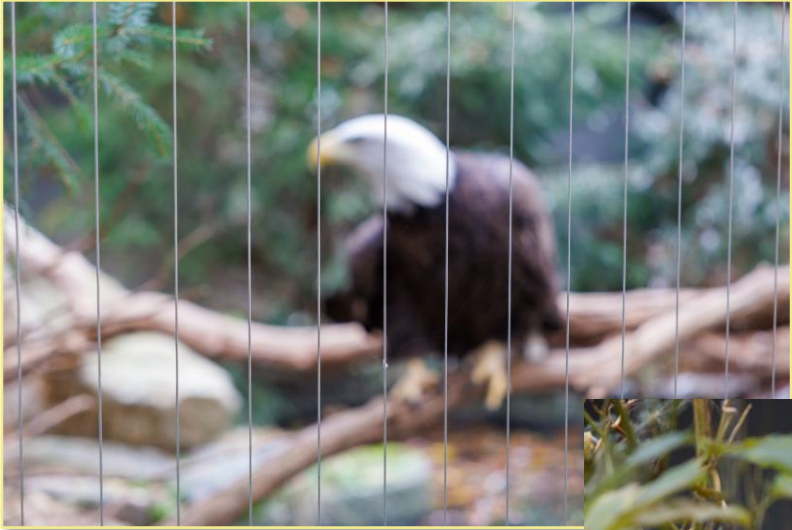
People

Lighting

Perspectives

...

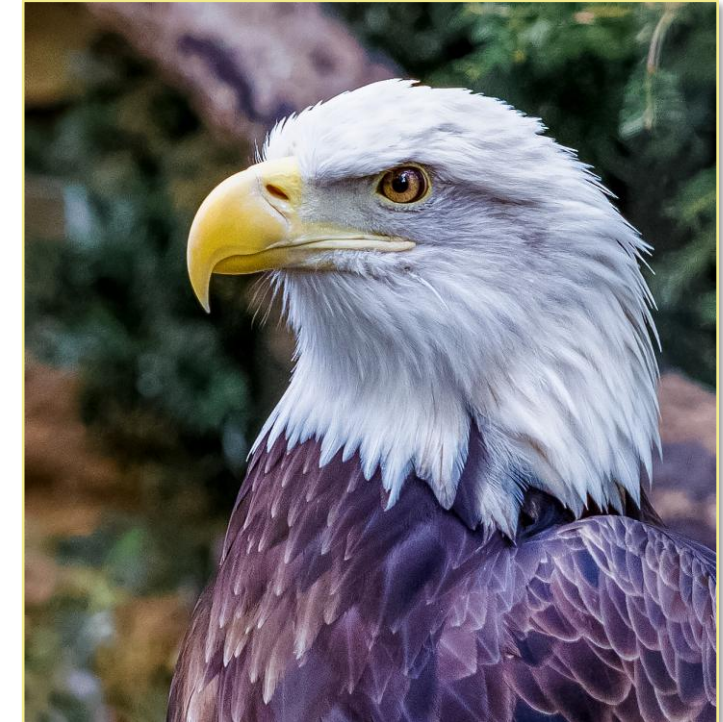
Overcoming Cages



1. Get camera close to fence
2. Focus on the animal
3. Use small number aperture
4. Better when animal's far from fence
5. Use longer focal length



ISO 1000, f/3.2, 1/1000, 70 mm



Same photo cropped in!

Overcoming Fences



To make the fence vanish, focused on the cheetah and used a smaller number aperture.



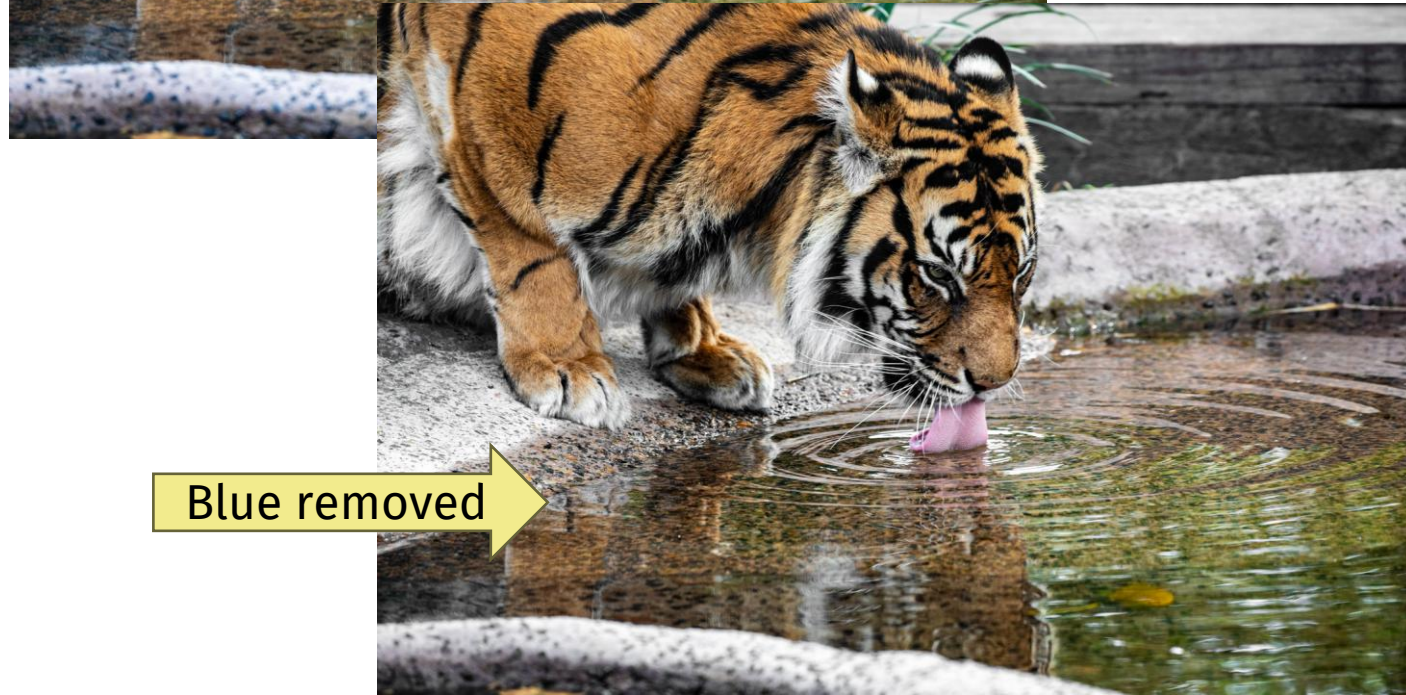
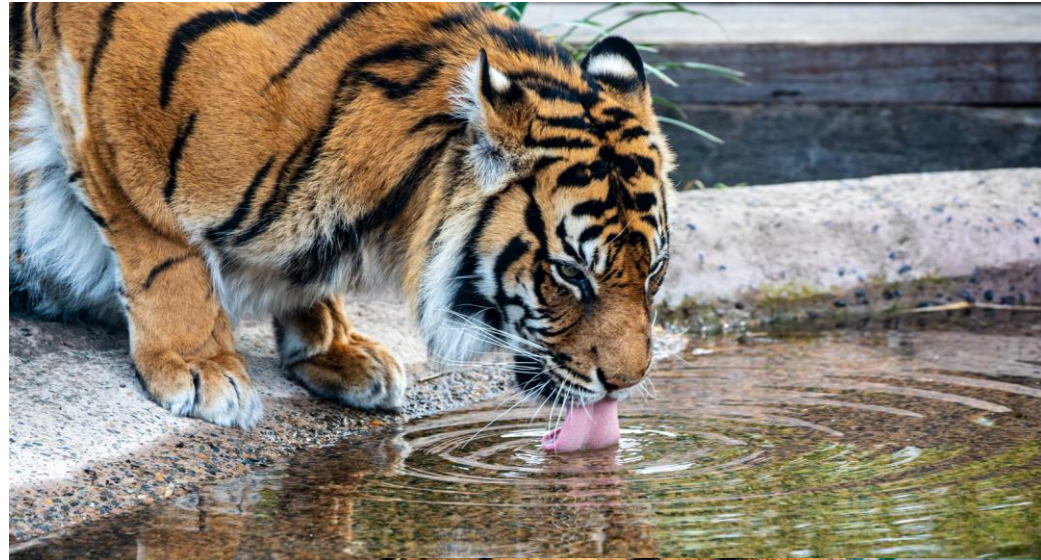
ISO 1250, f/5.6, 1/8000, 200 mm

Overcoming Glass Enclosures

When shooting through glass, position yourself at a 90-degree angle to minimize distortion.

Reduce reflections and glare by getting your lens very close to the glass.

Post-processing – consider removing the blue cast from the glass.

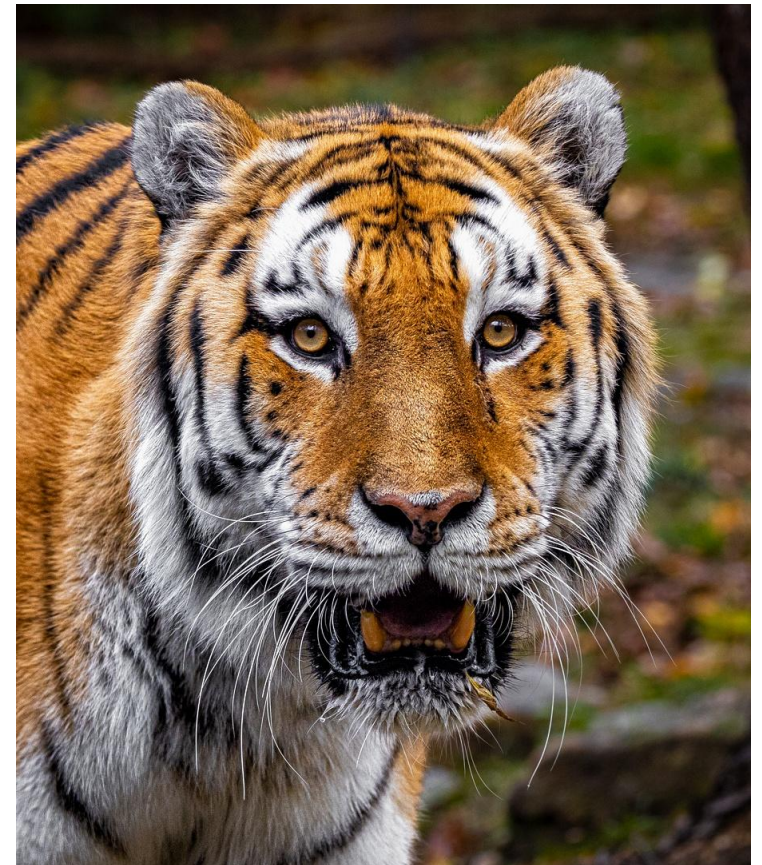


Overcoming Backgrounds – Crop & Blur

A photo of an animal is better than a photo of its zoo habitat.



ISO 1600, f/5.6, 1/500, 151 mm



Same photo cropped in!

When to Visit

During Off-Peak Times

Go weekdays and early mornings.

Crowds can be high during the summer and school breaks.

Wednesday, November 17, 2021 at 11:30 am.
Parking lot is nearly empty!!!



Consider Weather & What to Bring



Awareness of Weather Conditions

For you, your photography equipment and the animals.

Wear layers, with the top layer easy to remove since some areas are inside heated buildings.

Bring extra batteries, especially on cooler days.

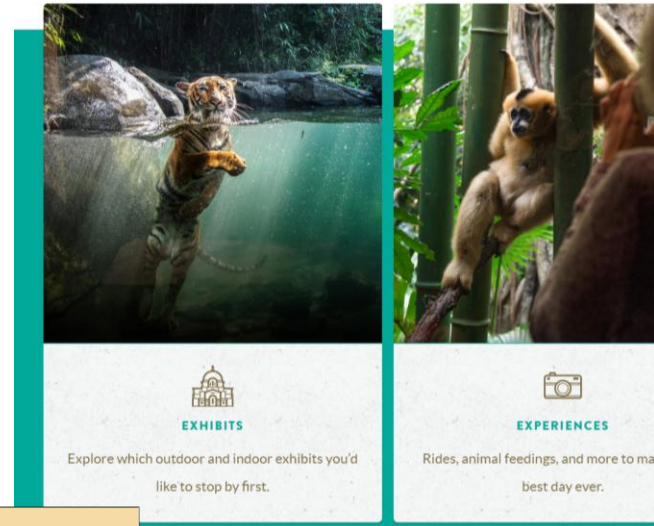
If you need an umbrella, consider staying home since animals often hide from the rain as well.

Don't pack too much. Consider at most one extra lens. No tripod. No flash.

Research Before Visiting

BUY TICKETS

Buy Tickets Online



DAILY SCHEDULE	
MARCH 3, 2025	
⚠ World of Birds closed for maintenance	
10:00 AM	ZOO OPENS
3:00 PM	BEE-EATER FEEDING ⌚ 15 minutes 📍 View on map
3:00 PM	SEA LION FEEDING ⌚ 15 minutes 📍 View on map
3:30 PM	PENGUIN FEEDING ⌚ 15 minutes 📍 View on map
3:45 PM	LAST ENTRY
4:00 PM	ANIMAL EXHIBITS CLOSE
4:30 PM	ZOO CLOSES

Research Zoo Activities

Identify feeding times, animal encounters and tours.

Get a Map!

[Check out Beardsley Zoo half price discount with your Newtown library card.](#)

Observe Animals Before Photographing



Spend Time Observing

Master the Art of Patience

This will help you anticipate their actions and position yourself.

Watch for patterns and trails.

Safety – Always Be Watchful



Be careful even when
with animal handlers!





ISO 500, f/6.3, 1/800, 200 mm



ISO 500, f/6.3, 1/1000, 126 mm



ISO 500, f/8, 1/2000, 80 mm

Safety – Follow the Rules

Don't roll down windows
in a Lion Park!

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What Makes Zoo Photography Impactful



When you want a donut but get kale instead!

A photo **of** something aims to
represent it.

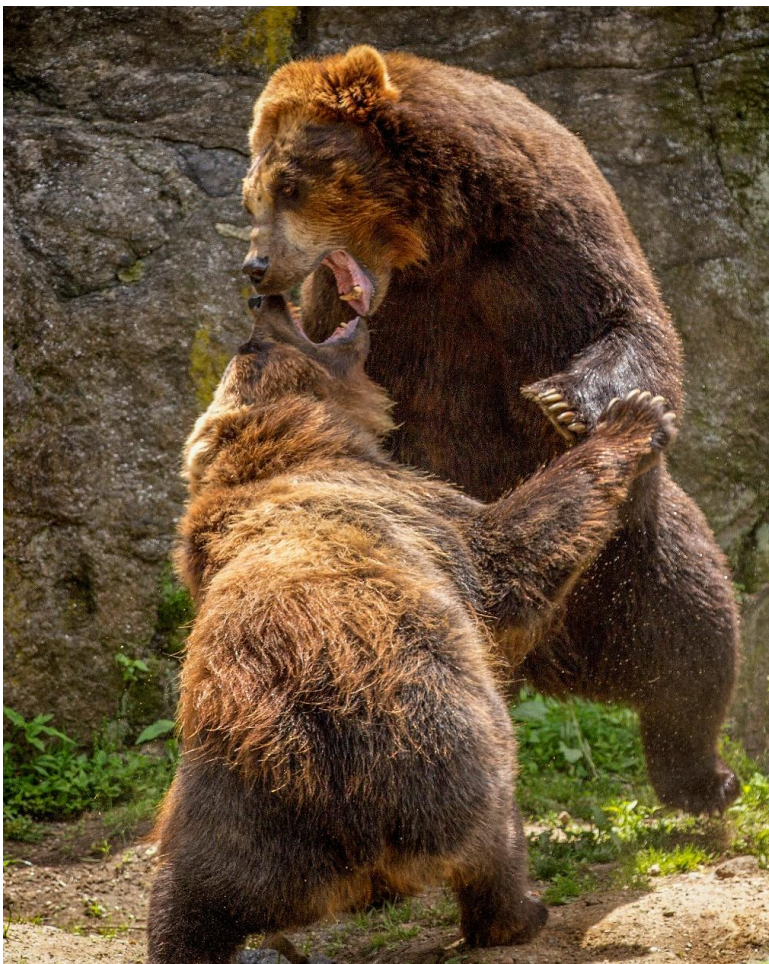


A photo **about** something aims
to tell a story.



Stories add impact!

Compose To Tell a Story



ISO 400, f/4.5, 1/1600, 165 mm



ISO 1250, f/3.5, 1/125, 155 mm



ISO 1250, f/6.3, 1/1000, 100 mm

Capturing the Moment

Lighting is Key

- Overcast days also provide excellent lighting conditions.
- The best times to shoot are typically early morning or late afternoon when the light is soft and diffused.
- Consider avoiding using flash when shooting through glass or fences, also it can disturb the animals.

Focus on the Eyes

- Capturing sharp, expressive eyes is crucial for creating a connection with the viewer
- If possible, utilize your camera's autofocus system to lock onto the animal's eyes.

Capture Animal Behavior

- Strive to capture animals exhibiting natural behaviors such as eating, playing, or interacting with each other.
- These photos tell a story and provide a glimpse into the animal's world.

Don't Overlook the Details

- Capture unique textures, patterns, and colors by focusing on specific details like fur, feathers, or scales.
- Close-up shots can add variety and interest.

Animal Behavior Isn't Always Predictable

Just when you think things are going well...



Taken with a mobile phone



ISO 500, f/4, 1/8000, 135 mm

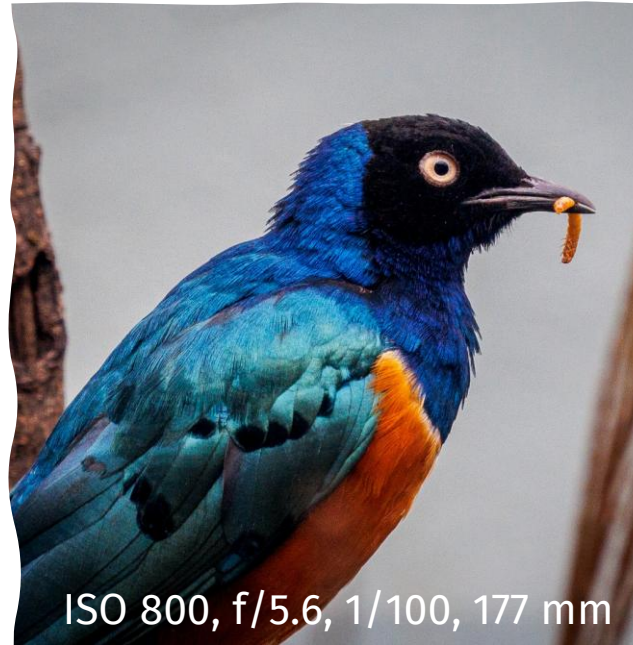


Composition – Get Close and Personal

- Use your feet, zoom in or crop to get close-up shots.
- Fill the frame with your subject to capture intricate details.
- This creates a sense of intimacy and connection with the animals.

Find Unique Perspectives

- Explore different angles and viewpoints to capture unique compositions.
- Try shooting from above, below, or through foliage to add depth and interest to your photos.
- Camera at their eye level.

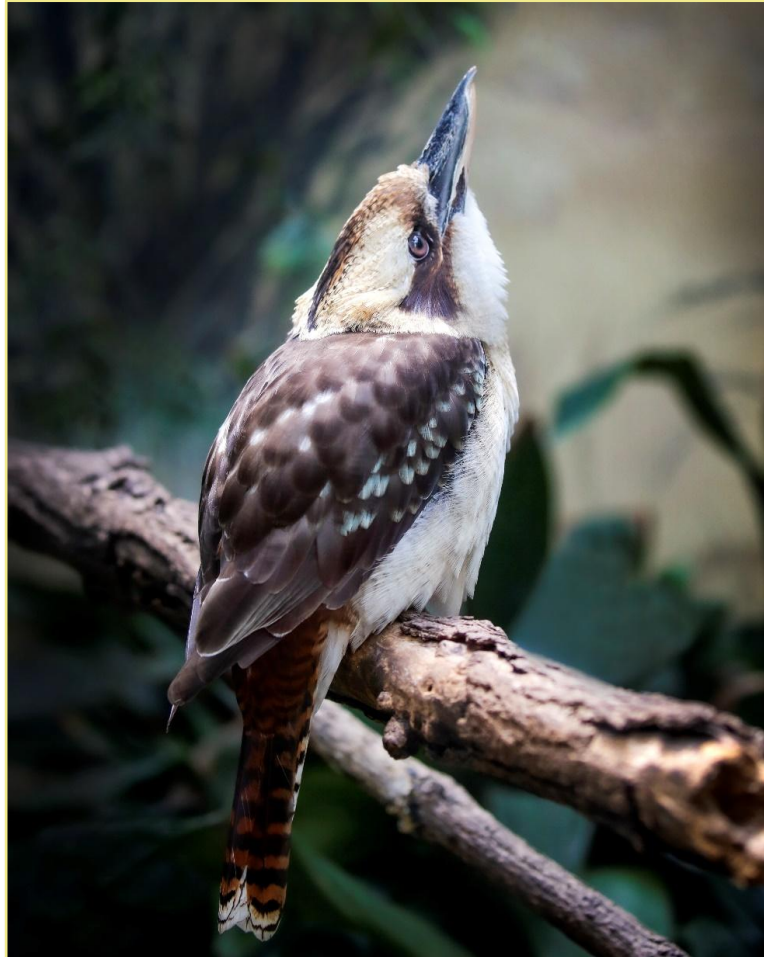


Work the Scene

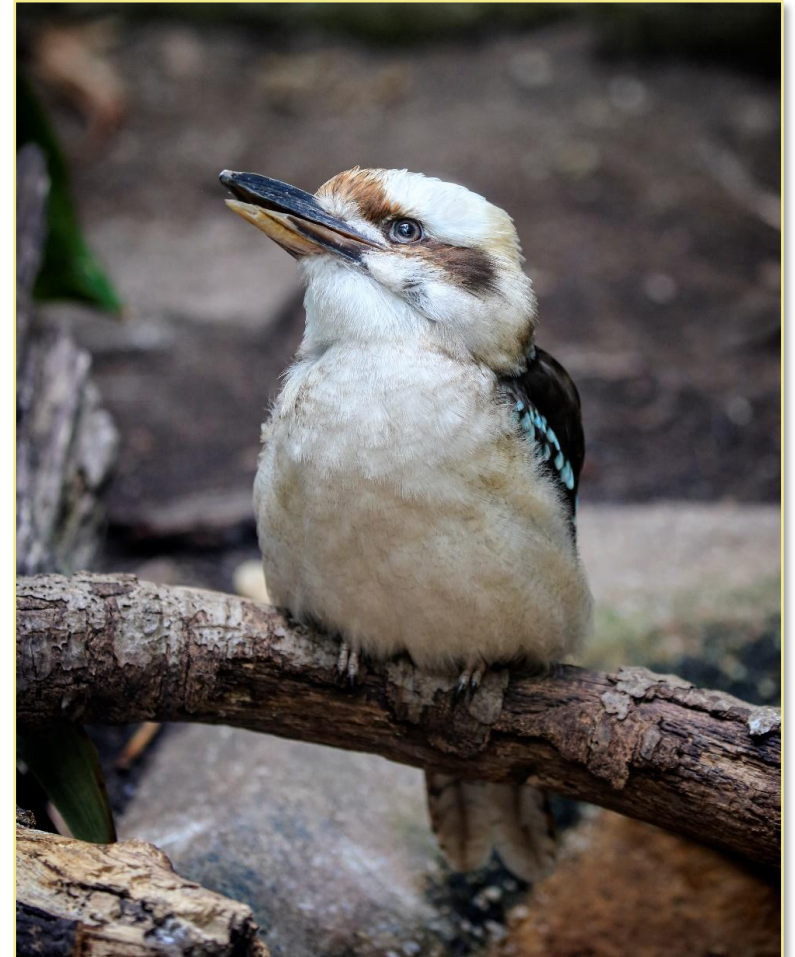
Think about doing a whole photo shoot on one subject.



ISO 1000, f/4.5, 1/250, 100 mm



ISO 1000, f/4.5, 1/250, 100 mm



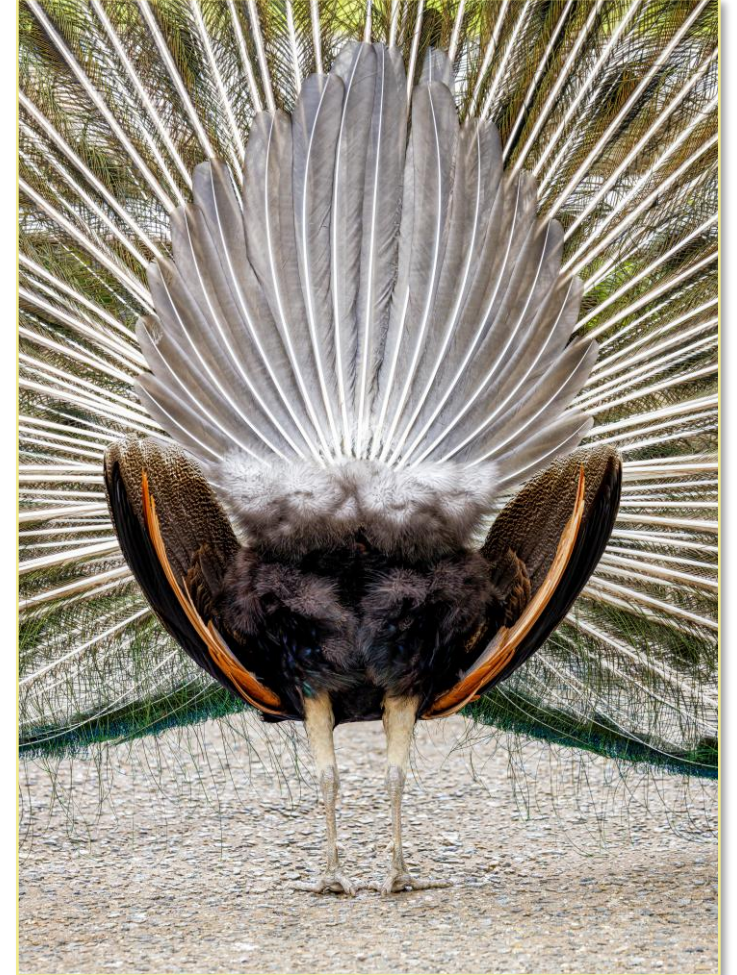
ISO 1000, f/5.0, 1/125, 158 mm

Don't forget to look behind you! Or behind your subject!



ISO 800, f/16.0, 1/200 s, 114 mm

“There are two sides to every story!”



ISO 640, f/6.3, 1/200 s, 300 mm

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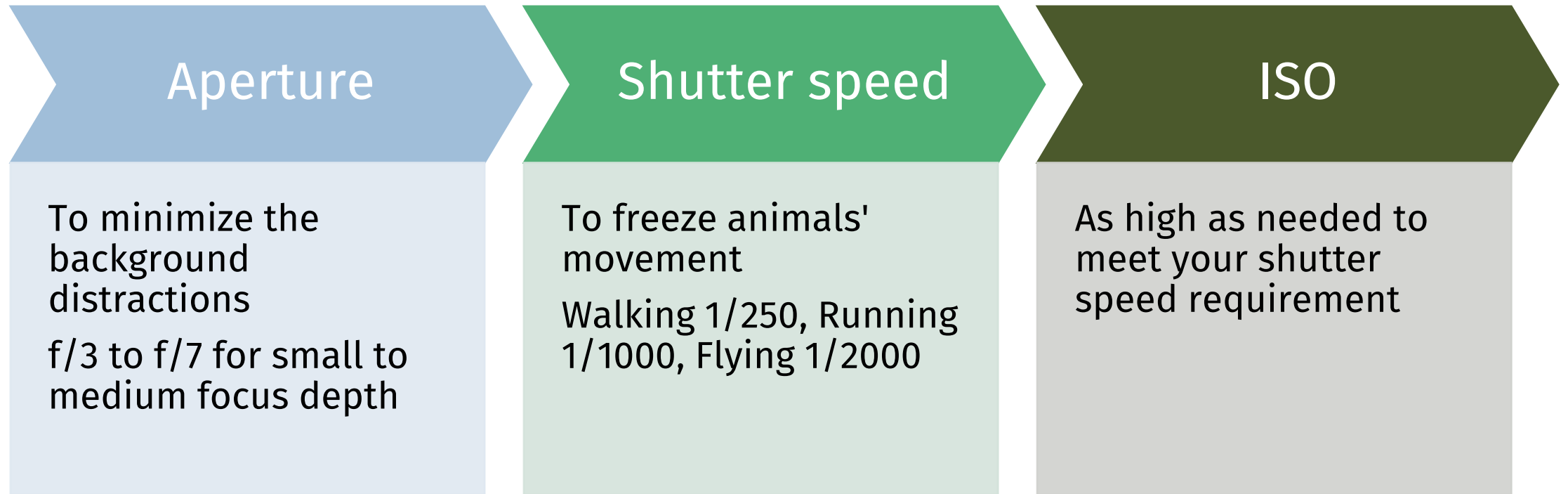
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Aperture Priority Mode



Focus

Eyes

- Eyes draw viewers attention

Tracking

- Leverage your camera's focus tracking functionality

Eye tracking

- Very handy if your camera has it

Shooting Mode

High speed
continuous

Memory
cards for
1,000+ photos

Lens

Zoom lens that
include 100mm or
more work well

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Question & Answer

- Next meeting?
- Zoom trip planning?
-
- Late March – Beardsley Zoo
- Mid-April – Bronx Zoo

