

BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOP

Five-Day Syllabus & Participant Guide

FIELD PRACTICE • IMAGE WORKFLOW • LIGHTROOM EDITING • PRESENTATION



From camera settings and field technique to culling, editing, and sharing finished photographs, this workshop follows a comprehensive bird photography process.

Workshop at a Glance

A five-day blend of field practice, classroom instruction, and guided image processing

Workshop Rhythm

Field days are followed by focused afternoon sessions so participants can apply new skills, review their images, and build a complete workflow from capture to final presentation.

Day	Field Session	Afternoon Workshop
1	-	4:00-6:00 PM Composition, camera settings, portraits, and birds in flight
2	8:00 AM-3:00 PM	4:00-6:00 PM Uploading, culling, and preparing images for processing
3	8:00 AM-3:00 PM	4:00-6:00 PM Processing in Lightroom
4	8:00 AM-3:00 PM	4:00-6:00 PM Participant processing work session
5	8:00 AM-3:00 PM	4:00-6:00 PM Participant presentations

EARLY FIELD-TRIP STARTS

Some field trips may begin at 6:00 AM, including potential outings for Great Gray Owls and a trip to Klamath County.

What to Bring

Field Equipment

- Camera and a loooooong lens or lenses
- Monopod and/or tripod
- Fully charged batteries
- Memory cards

Digital Workflow

- Laptop computer and mouse
- External hard drive (optional but recommended)
- Lightroom or preferred editing software
- Charging cables and card reader, or another way to load pictures onto your hard drive

WORKSHOP GOAL

What is your purpose for the pictures? Develop a repeatable process for making photographs with intention: decide what you want the image to accomplish, capture it effectively, select the strongest frame, process it carefully, and prepare it for sharing or printing.

Begin With Purpose

In choosing settings and composition, consider what you want the photograph to do. Is it for identification, documentation, publication, an online post, a print, or an artistic project? Your purpose helps guide every later decision.

Vision & Artistic Intent

- Identify the themes, emotions, or message you want the image to convey.
- Notice what makes your perspective distinct.
- Anticipate how the final photograph should feel before you capture it.

Composition

- Arrange elements to guide the viewer's eye.
- Choose what to include and what to leave out.
- Use framing, leading lines, balance, and the rule of thirds intentionally.

What Strong Composition Can Do

- Create visual tension or a sense of calm.
- Direct attention to the bird or another important detail.
- Express balance, harmony, clarity, or purposeful ambiguity.
- Use foreground, middle ground, and background to create depth.
- Use negative space to emphasize movement, direction, or scale.
- Place the bird within a habitat to tell a story and establish a sense of place.
- Fill the frame when details, expression, or portrait impact are most important.
- Look for uncommon, original, or surprising moments.

WHY BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY IS CHALLENGING

Birds move, bounce, turn, blink, and fly unpredictably. Light and backgrounds can change within seconds. Good technique creates room for creativity when the subject does not cooperate.

Core Shooting Topics

Portraits

- Photograph at eye level when possible.
- Pay attention to eye contact, head angle, and background separation.
- Adjust exposure for white, dark, or strongly backlit birds.
- Capture a safe image first, then refine your settings.

Birds in Flight

- Practice finding and tracking moving subjects in the viewfinder.
- Use continuous autofocus and an appropriate AF area mode.
- Choose a shutter speed that matches the bird's movement.
- Shoot in bursts while maintaining deliberate framing.

Field Techniques

- Get close to birds while minimizing disturbance.
- Stabilize the camera with good handholding technique, a monopod, or a tripod.
- Program a button to cycle quickly through autofocus area modes.
- Prefocus at approximately the same distance as the expected subject.
- Use a "safety shot" at a higher ISO or faster shutter speed, then reduce ISO or shutter speed for cleaner follow-up images when conditions allow.
- Get closer responsibly by using blinds, improving your position, and moving quietly.
- Work at the bird's eye level whenever practical.

Camera Settings to Practice

Exposure: Auto ISO versus manual ISO; shutter speed; aperture; exposure compensation.

Exposure modes: Manual, aperture priority, and shutter priority.

File format: Shoot RAW rather than JPEG when you plan to process images.

Stabilization: Use the image-stabilization or vibration-reduction mode appropriate for your camera and shooting situation.

Focus mode: Use continuous autofocus for moving subjects.

Back-button focus: Separate focusing from the shutter release for control and ergonomics.

Metering: Practice matrix or evaluative metering; discuss highlight-weighted metering.

Burst rate: Practice controlled bursts, including high-frame-rate shooting when appropriate.

Autofocus Area Modes

Become familiar with the autofocus modes available on your camera. Practice switching between precise single-point modes, wider tracking areas, and subject-detection or automatic modes. Smaller focus areas offer precision but can be harder to keep on a moving bird. Wider or automatic modes often work best in less complex scenes. Subject detection can help identify a bird's body, face, or eye, but turn it off when it becomes unreliable.

Focus-Point Handoff

Focus-point handoff allows for seamless transition between autofocus points during shooting. The exact setup varies by camera, but it generally uses a compatible autofocus mode and settings that allow the camera to continue following a subject as it moves across the frame. Become familiar with the options available on your camera, and practice switching between them before the field sessions.

1. Import and Organize

- Upload images to a hard drive and organize them by place and date.
- Create a "To Review" folder. Store collections inside that folder and work from the appropriate collection.
- Cull as soon after the field session as practical, while the sequence and conditions are still fresh.
- Keep your Lightroom catalog on the computer for speed and use 1:1 previews when helpful.

2. Review With Intention

- Be decisive: remove images that are technically poor, redundant, uninteresting, or do not support your purpose.
- View images at 100% - or 200% on high-resolution monitors - when judging sharpness and detail.
- When comparing a sequence, choose the strongest image rather than focusing only on which images to reject.
- Learn what sharpness looks like with your own lens and remove unnecessary insurance shots when a better frame is available.
- For dark frames, temporarily raise exposure and synchronize similar adjustments when needed to make a fair evaluation.

3. Rate, Flag, and Compare

Tool	Shortcut	Use
Rating	1 / 2 / 3 / 4	First cut / detailed edit / publish / print
Flags	P / X / U	Pick / reject / unpick
Views	N / C / G	Survey / compare / grid
Advance	Caps Lock	Automatically move to the next image
Delete	Ctrl or Cmd + Delete	Delete rejected images from disk

4. Revisit, Keyword, and Back Up

- After the first review, step away before making final selections; time can make evaluation more objective.
- Scan selected images again in grid view and mark the photographs that truly stand out for detailed processing.
- Add keywords for location and subject to images that survive the first cut.
- Discuss storage, travel workflows, catalog backups, local hard drives, and cloud backup options.

KEEP LIGHTROOM RESPONSIVE

Build and discard 1:1 previews intentionally. The instructor uses automatic deletion after 30 days, but previews can also be discarded manually to save hard-drive space.

A Practical Editing Sequence

01	Choose the strongest files using the rating system.
02	Crop to strengthen composition and remove unnecessary space.
03	Apply denoise and modest sharpening.
04	Remove distracting elements when appropriate.
05	Use the histogram to make global tone adjustments: exposure, contrast, highlights, shadows, and tone curve.
06	Adjust texture, clarity, and dehaze with restraint.
07	Use masks for local adjustments to the subject, background, eye, and other important areas; then revisit the global edits.

When Lightroom Is Not Enough

Photoshop may be useful for composites, text, artistic effects, and tasks Lightroom does not handle well. Other software - including ON1, Luminar, Affinity, DxO, and Topaz - may be used for difficult sharpening, denoising, and upscaling, though the newest version of Lightroom has added some functionality in these areas, including with the recent purchase of Topaz. **The workshop focuses on decision-making and workflow rather than requiring a specific software package.**

Workshop 3: Demonstration

- Instructor, guides, and participant workflow examples.
- Live editing from first selection through detailed adjustments.
- Discussion of why each change supports the image's purpose.

Workshop 4: Work Session

- Dedicated time to edit your own photographs.
- Participant questions to help clarify editing issues.
- Individual help and troubleshooting from the instructor and other experts.
- Prepare candidate images for the final presentation.

Prepare Images for Their Destination

- Revisit edits before publishing or sharing.
- Use the 3-star rating for photographs ready to publish or share.
- Use the 4-star rating for photographs selected for printing.
- Back up the Lightroom catalog when closing the program.
- Maintain more than one local copy and consider a continuous cloud backup.

INSTRUCTOR WORKFLOW EXAMPLE

The instructor stores photographs on two local hard drives and uses a continuous cloud backup. Participants are encouraged to develop a backup plan that matches their own equipment and travel needs.

Final Presentation

Each participant will present several photographs they hope to perfect, publish, post, share, print, enter in a contest, or give as a gift. Use KBO's website to publish pictures from the workshop. The presentation is an opportunity to explain the purpose behind each image, describe the choices made in the field and during processing, and receive supportive feedback.

Choose Your Images • Select several photographs that hold your interest. • Include images that demonstrate progress, a challenge, or a clear artistic intention. • Confirm that each image is prepared for its intended destination.	Prepare to Discuss • What was your purpose for making the photograph? • What field technique or camera setting mattered most? • What did you change during processing - and why? • What would you try differently next time?
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Final Image Checklist

☐	The subject and story are clear.
☐	The crop and composition support the purpose of the image.
☐	Exposure, color, noise reduction, and sharpening are appropriate.
☐	Local adjustments look natural and distractions have been addressed.
☐	The file is sized and exported for its intended use.
☐	The original file, edited file, and catalog are backed up.

THE COMPLETE PROCESS

Purpose -> artistic intent -> composition -> field technique -> selection -> detailed editing -> presentation. Use this sequence after the workshop to build a consistent, thoughtful bird photography practice.