



Photographing Birds

Make Use Of May

May is the peak of the breeding season for garden birds and there is more activity to photograph than at any other time of year. Successful bird photography is the result of observation, planning, preparation and patience, and this applies even to your lowly sparrow. You can't just see a bird in your garden and rush out and photograph it then expect great images.

Be Respectful

During the nesting season, birds are extremely sensitive. They do not have the same bond with their offspring as mammals do, and will desert their young at the slightest disturbance. This must always be considered carefully throughout any preparation work and during photography sessions. Watch where the birds in your garden go. Look for a finch or robin flying from the same bush repeatedly. If you think a bird has a nest nearby don't go looking for it, as just your presence near a nest could be sufficient to put the birds off. Try cutting a stick from a hazel bush and pushing it into the ground near where you have seen the bird coming from. If the bird regularly perches on the stick on its way to the nest, then it would be worth pursuing as a photographic project.

Hide Yourself

To photograph garden birds, the first stage is to make yourself inconspicuous by constructing an inexpensive hide. A hide must be introduced near a nest in gradual stages to prevent it from upsetting the birds. Scrounge some old bits of cloth or sheets, preferably of subdued colours like green or brown. Cut four sticks and drape the cloths around these. You can hide in this and the birds will take no notice of you except for one thing. If they see you crawl into your makeshift hide they will know you are there and will refuse to come back to their nest.

How to photograph garden birds

- * **Wed, 10 Jun 2009**
- * Colin Varndell

It's easy to get fantastic pictures of the birds in your garden, What Digital Camera tells you how, and what kit to use...

How to photograph garden birds:

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How to shoot garden birds - a Grey Wagtail

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How to photograph garden birds - a Coal Tit

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How to shoot garden birds - a Robin

When your subject lands on the perch for the first time, refrain from tripping the shutter. If the bird has any doubts at all, this will be when it is most nervous. Let it come and go a few times before you start taking pictures. When you are confident that your subject is at ease, select a wide aperture to blur the background and wait until the bird is side on to you, to ensure it is all in focus. When you have successfully completed your session, be cautious not to startle the bird upon leaving your hide. This is because a human suddenly emerging could have a very startling effect on birds which might cause them to desert their nest.

How to shoot garden birds: Get bird-wise

Encourage birds to visit your garden by growing plants that bear fruit to attract them. Or leave out food and water for them. You can sometimes photograph birds from an open window. Keep the camera on a tripod, close the curtains, set up a perch within range of your lens and wait. You don't need bright sunshine. Early morning sun can be good but overhead sunlight creates unflattering contrast. Soft, diffused light is often easiest to work with.

Making a hide to photograph garden birds:



How to photograph garden birds - making a hideaway

Step 1: Prepare the sticks

First, cut four sticks around 1.5m long with plenty of top growth.

Step 2: Trim the sticks

Trim off the tops of the sticks, leaving some branches to support the hide cloth. Make a sharp point on the other end.

Step 3: Portable seat

Sort yourself a comfortable seat. Three-legged, portable seats are inexpensive and available at garden centres and DIY stores.

Step 4: Set the frame of the hide

Push the four sticks into the ground to provide enough room for your seat and tripod. Make sure the front of the lens protrudes beyond the forward sticks.

Step 5: Cover it with material

Scrounge some dull coloured material and drape it over the sticks. Here, we used an old bedsheet. There is no need to make a roof because birds will not associate you with danger if they happen to fly above you.

Step 6: Cut a lens-sized hole

Cut a hole in the cloth just large enough for the lens to fit through snugly. Cut a horizontal slit above the lens hole which will allow you to view the subject.

Step 7: All set

The hide is ready to gradually move into position, so you can get ready to take great bird shots!