

BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY

Dataw's Rookeries, Egrets and Herons

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**WHO, WHAT,
WHY, WHEN,
WHERE AND
HOWS**

Who: Seven of Dataw's Egrets and Herons

What: Their Mating, Nesting, Chicks, and Fledglings

Why: Best photographic subjects on Dataw

When: March and April

Where: Dataw's rookeries and nesting areas

How: With today's program and next month's field trips



WHO: GREAT, SNOWY AND CATTLE EGRETS

In breeding plumage

**WHO: GREAT BLUE, LITTLE BLUE, TRI-COLORED,
GREEN, AND BLACK CROWNED NIGHT HERONS**



WHAT: MATING DISPLAYS



MATING DANCES



MATING



NESTING



EGGS



THE CHICKS



FLEDGLINGS AND JUVENILES





WHY BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY?

- Dataw Island is home or a lay over for over 80 species of birds
- The best photographic subjects, available out our front doors, and through the year
- Our rookeries, ponds, and osprey nests are easily accessible
- Our birds residents are close at hand and used to human presence

- March and April provide the greatest opportunities for heron and egret photography
- Great egrets, in mid-March, followed in two weeks or so by snowy egrets
- Little blues and tricoloreds begin later, in early April
- Great blue herons are in late March to early April
- Green herons and black-crowned night herons are beginning their mating dances in late March
- From mating dances to fledglings takes four to five weeks
- Great egrets are first to begin their mating

WHEN?

WHERE?

Dataw's rookeries
and
nesting areas

Community Center

Sparrows Nest

Gleason's Court

Morgan 13

Port Royal

On common grounds, no private property

At least 100' from nests, 50 feet from others

Today's
program

March and April small group
field trips

Seven Key Foundations (in order of importance)

- Light – most important: early morning or evening
- Sharpness – bird's eye, or feathers must be sharp
- Point of view – eye level with the bird
- Background - pleasing, uncluttered, make bird stand out
- Edges of frame – clean edges, no sticks intruding
- Composition – thirds as a guide
- Exposure – mood or tone

HOW?

MINIMAL EQUIPMENT

- DSLR, mirrorless, or bridge camera
- 300mm or greater telephoto lens or equivalent
 - 200mm with APS-C sensors (most of us) is the equivalent of 320mm (200mm X 1.6)
 - 200mm with APS-C and a 1.4 teleconverter is the equivalent of 450mm (200 X 1.6 X 1.4)
- Image Stabilization (most of us)
- or a tripod or monopod
- Extra batteries

CAMERA SETTINGS

- Camera Raw, or RAW + JPEG
- Auto white balance
- ISO – 400 or Auto
- Autofocusing – AI servo
- Drive mode – high speed continuous, silent if available
- Shooting mode – popular choice is aperture priority (set the aperture to control background and DOF)
 - Set widest aperture, reasonably high ISO (800), let the camera choose the shutter speed
- Exposure metering mode – evaluative or spot



LIGHT: TIME OF DAY

- First three and last three hours of the day are the best
 - Predawn (the blue hour) – forty minutes before sunrise, pinks and lavenders
- Sunrise – east, silhouettes; west, perfect light: no shadows, warm light
 - Early morning (the golden hour) – soft, warm, buttery yellow
 - Mornings – birds are most active, images will be shaper
- Sunset –silhouettes, underexpose for drama

LIGHT: DIRECTION

- Front Lighting - shadow pointing at the bird. Combined with morning light, best chance for strong image
- Side Lighting – challenging, but can be rewarding. Contrast increased
- Backlighting – dramatic silhouettes. Underexpose one to two stops, increases blacks, enhances sky

GETTING A SHARP IMAGE

- Lens quality
- How camera is held
- Use a tripod or monopod
- Camera settings

CAMERA SETTINGS

- Shutter speed – fastest possible with manageable ISO
- AF area selection
 - Single-point spot, when shooting bird through branches
 - Single spot, stationary birds, on eye
 - AF Point expansion (four points), default
 - AF Point expansion (8 pts.), fast flying birds
- AI Servo, set to AF first, then shutter release
- Low light = low contrast makes AF difficult. Increase ISO, open aperture, look for nearby edges
 - Flash
- Depth of Field

EXPOSURE METERING MODES

- Evaluative Metering Mode - Default mode. Camera meters light in whole frame with emphasis on the area around the active focus point.
- Spot Metering – pin points metering on a specific subject.
- Histograms and exposure compensation.
 - Spot meter on a great egret will expose the egret as 18% gray, and thus it will be underexposed. Use Exposure Compensation to add light.
 - Using evaluative meter with snowy egret and a dark background will overexpose the egret. Use EC to subtract light.
- Sunny 16 rule – shutter speed = $1/\text{ISO}$ @ f16 on a sunny day.
 - Add a stop if cloudy or hazy, two or three stops if it's dark or very hazy.

DRIVE MODES

- Burst Mode – three or four quick bursts to allow AF to catch up
- High Speed Continuous for birds in flight.
- Silent mode – if within 25 feet
- Wireless remote – natural images without human interference

IMAGE DESIGN

- Point of View: location of camera in relationship to bird
 - Best light and interesting angle
 - Eye level if possible
- Backgrounds
 - Soft focus, bird tack sharp
 - Telephoto, wide open, background separation
 - Or in focus habitat
- Edges of frame clean
- Composition
 - Rule of Thirds
 - Center focus; maybe if bird is looking straight at you
 - Balance
 - Leading and diagonal lines
 - Room to move

HOW TO PHOTOGRAPH WHITE BIRDS

1. Brilliance plus intricate detail in plumage
2. Underexposing, too dull; overexposing, blown out highlights
3. Shoot manual, w/ highlight alerts (“blinkies”)
4. Spot metering, on brightest part, and adjust settings to register +2
5. Avoid bright mid-day sun



BIRDS IN FLIGHT

1. Fastest shutter speed possible (1/1000 minimum)
2. ISO highest level (w/o noise), or Auto ISO
3. Lowest f-stop
4. AF tracking
5. Burst Mode
6. Track with eye on hot shoe and lens front
7. When bird lines up, move eye to viewfinder
8. Keep bird in same location in viewfinder as you pan
9. Manual mode when there is a changing background

SEVEN TIPS

1. Leave space in front of the bird
2. Fill the frame (bird at least 1/3 of frame)
3. Don't clip wings or feet
4. Don't clip highlights (especially with white birds)
5. Faster shutter speed = greater sharpness
6. Learn about bird behavior to better anticipate action
7. The 3 Ps: Practice, Patience, Persistence

TEN MORE TIPS

1. Point your shadow at the bird
2. Use the rule of thirds, or other compositional plan
3. Focus on the eye (or feathers)
4. Get a sparkle in the eye
5. Try to have bird's head angled toward the camera
6. Level your tripod
7. Shoot in morning light (birds more active)
8. Get a soft background (DOF, wide open, background further back)
9. Get eye level with the bird
10. Separate birds in flight

1. Shoot in RAW
2. Don't add, remove, or manipulate individual elements of photo (esp. for competition)
3. Don't crop too much (don't squish the bird, leave space for bird in flight to fly)
4. Do adjust exposure, contrast, and vibrancy (avoid too much saturation, though)
5. Easy on the sharpening (crispy)

DOs AND DON'Ts OF POST PROCESSING

IN SUMMARY

HOW TO PHOTOGRAPH BIRDS

1. Focus on the eye
2. Frame the image
3. Scan borders and edges
4. Check the composition
5. Check background: soft or sharp
6. Set the aperture accordingly
7. Review the contents of the entire frame
8. Take a test shot
9. Review the histogram
10. Make necessary exposure adjustments
11. Squeeze off a shot

