

How to Photograph Animals

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Last Updated: April 8, 2021

People have a close relationship and connection to animals. Capturing animals in photographs can be a great way to display your appreciation for them. There are lots of different approaches to animal photography. In order to photograph animals, you will need to prepare the shot and follow general shooting guidelines. While photographing animals, consider taking portraits, candid shots, and capturing the animal in motion.

Things You'll Need

- ☐ HD camera
- ☐ Camera lenses
- ☐ A subject

Method 1

Method 1 of 4: Preparing to Shoot



1 Organize your gear and equipment. It is important to first understand and prepare your equipment, before you begin shooting. When photographing animals, there is a level of unpredictability, so knowing how to properly use your camera and gear is important for getting a great shot.^[1]

- You will want to be familiar with how to use a [digital SLR](#) camera and its features.
- You should also know how to use other camera gear required, such as telephoto [lenses](#) for shooting from a distance.^[2] This is particularly handy for photographing wild animals.
- Consider other gear, such as a tripod and a camera bag, for transporting your equipment.



2 Research your subject. If you are photographing wildlife, it will be beneficial to understand some of the habits and behaviours of the animal you are photographing. Learning about the animal will give you ideas for potential shots and make it easier to locate the animal in the wild.^[3]

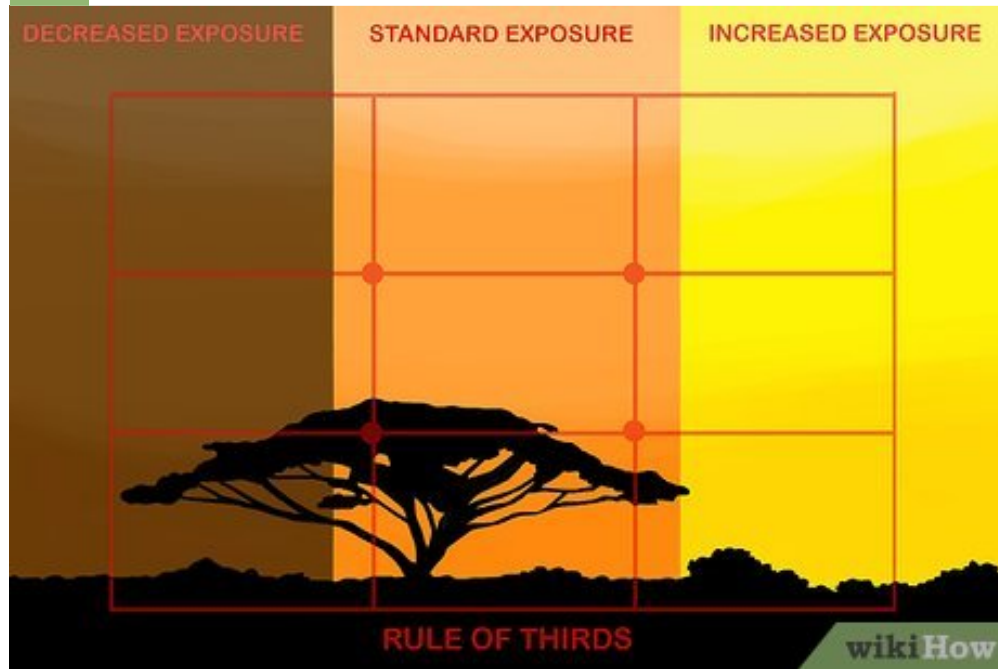
- Know the habitat, footprints, calls, sleep patterns, etc. of the animal you want to photograph.
- For example, knowing that Blue Jays live in eastern and central North America and have a distinct 'jay' call will be useful in locating Blue Jays to photograph.^[4]
- Alternatively, if you are photographing a pet or domestic animal, it is a good idea to spend some time getting to know the animal before you start taking photos. This will help relax the animal and you will be able to get more natural photos.



3 Setup the shot. Before you begin you should set up your equipment and take some test shots to make sure everything is in the right place. You can test lighting, angles, camera settings, etc. before you start photographing the animal.

- If you are doing a staged shot you can set up any backgrounds or props that will be included.

Method 2 of 4: Following General Shooting Guidelines



1 Understand exposure and composition. When photographing animals, like with most other photography, it is helpful to have an understanding of photographic elements such as, [exposure](#) and [composition](#). These techniques will help to ensure that you get the best results.^[5]



2 Take outdoor photos in the early morning or late afternoon. When photographing animals outdoors, you will be relying on natural sunlight. The early morning and late afternoon hours are usually the best time for taking photos outside. At this time the sun creates a golden light, that works well for photography^[6] .^[7]

- Alternatively, overcast days can also create ideal lighting, as the clouds filter the light evenly.
- Using flashes can be distracting to animals, and may scare them out of position.



3 Shoot close-up in bright lighting. If you have no choice but to shoot in bright light, you should try to shoot as close up and tight to your subject as possible. This will help get rid of any shadows or other distractions from the photo.[8]



4 Be patient. When photographing animals, you are working with a subject that you have little to no control over. Because of this, you should be prepared for it to take a significant amount of time. You have to be willing to wait in order to capture the unique, unplanned moments that are created by the animal.[9]

Method 3 of 4: Taking Portraits

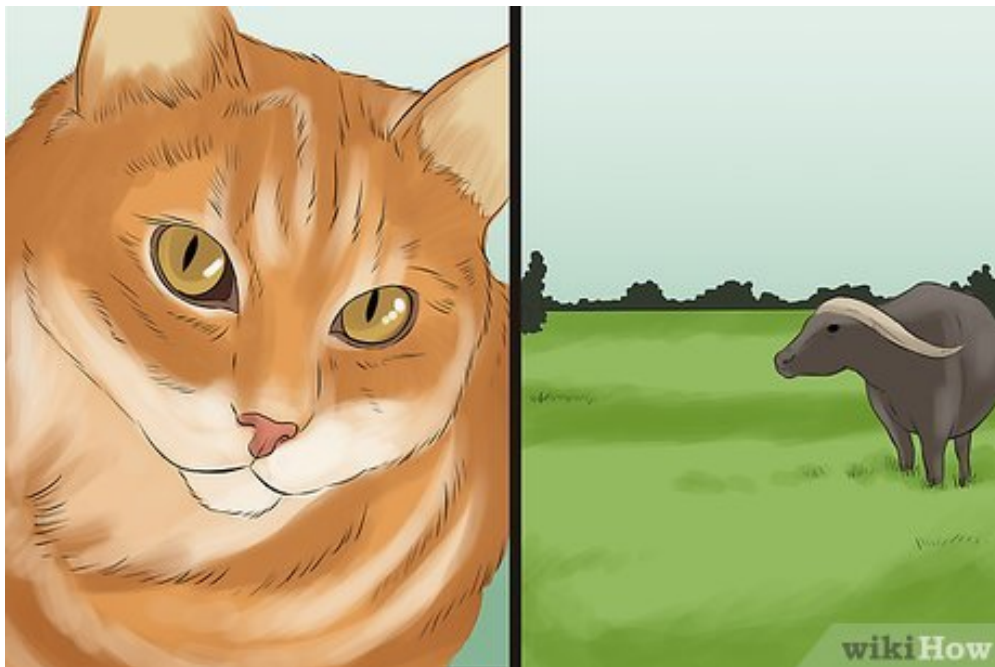


1 Get down on their level. In order to create a sense of intimacy in your photos you should physically lower your angle to capture the animal's perspective. This strategy also makes it easier to get eye contact with the animal, which will help make the shots more personal.^[10]



2 Capture their personality. Before photographing a pet consider what makes the pet unique and how you can reflect their character through photos. For example, photograph the pet engaging in their favourite activity, be it napping or playing fetch.^[11]

- Similarly, if you are photographing wild animals, consider their unique behaviours and features, and try to emphasize them in your photos.



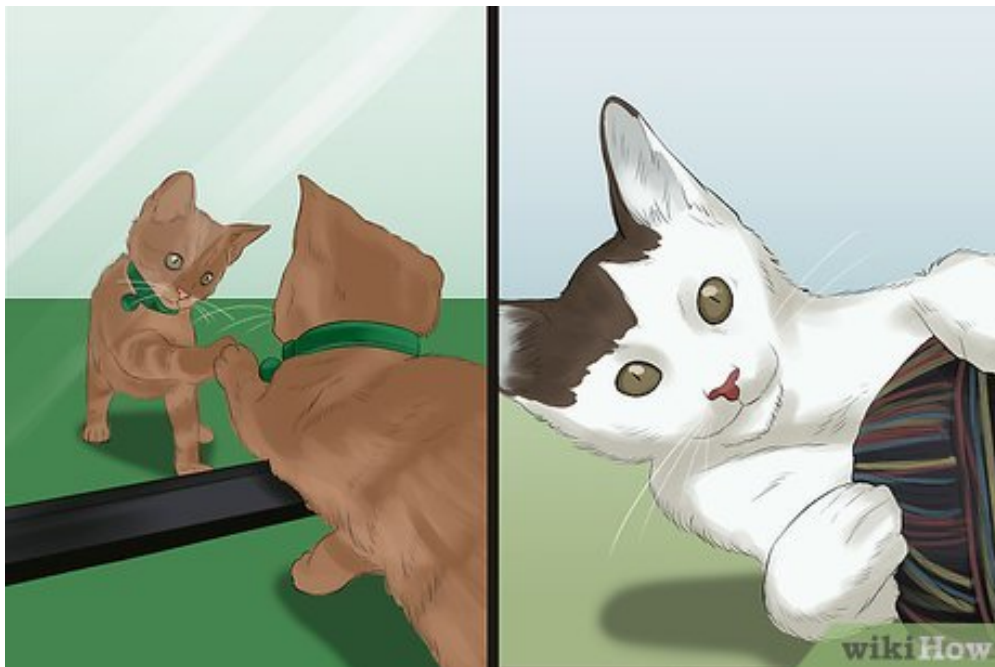
3 Take close-up and wide angle shots. Capturing close-up, face shots of animals can be a great style for portraits. This tight angle, creates an intimacy and allows you to make eye contact through the photo. Also consider wider angles to display the surrounding landscape.

- A wider angle will allow you to show the animal in a larger context. For example, a wider angle shot of a buffalo grazing in a field, captures the habitat and reality of a plains buffalo.^[12]



4 Add people. Pets and domestic animals have a strong connection to people. Photographing a pet with their owner is a great way to capture that bond.^[13]

- Photos of animals with people can be taken as staged portraits or as candid.^[14]



5 Take a mix of staged and candid shots. Pets are often trained, allowing for staged photos, unlike wild animals. However, it is good to take both staged and candid shots to accurately capture the animal through photos.^[15]

- When taking staged photos, try to get close up shots with eye contact. You can use their toys or treats to direct their vision toward the camera.^[16]
- Candid photos come across as more natural and are a fun way to capture the animal's individuality.

Method 4 of 4: Capturing Animals in Motion

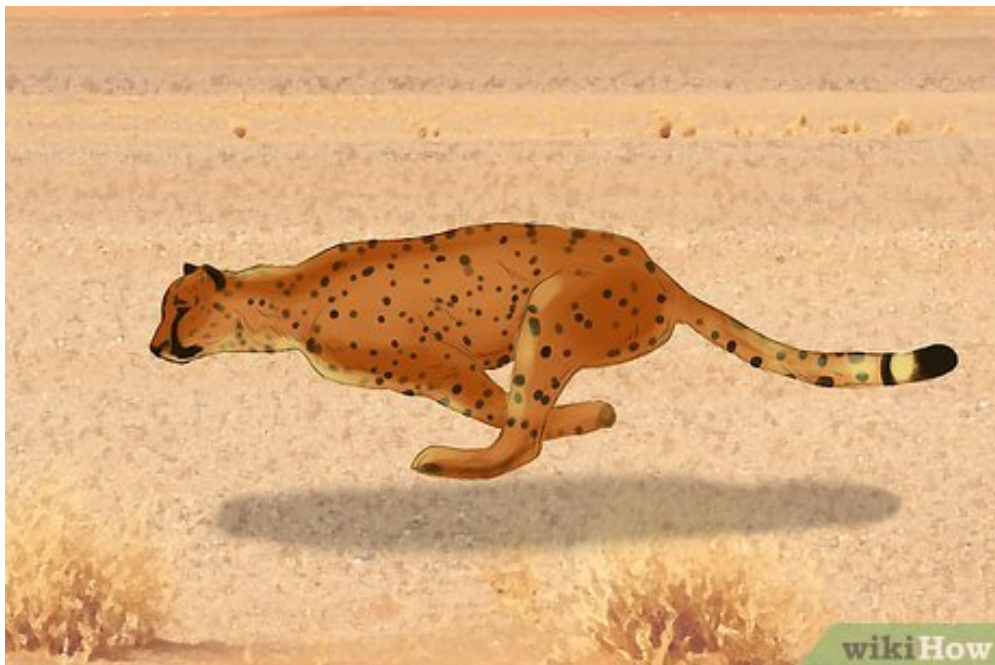


1 Adjust the shutter speed. When taking photos of moving animals you want to clearly freeze the animal in mid-motion. This can be done by putting your camera in shutter priority mode. [17]

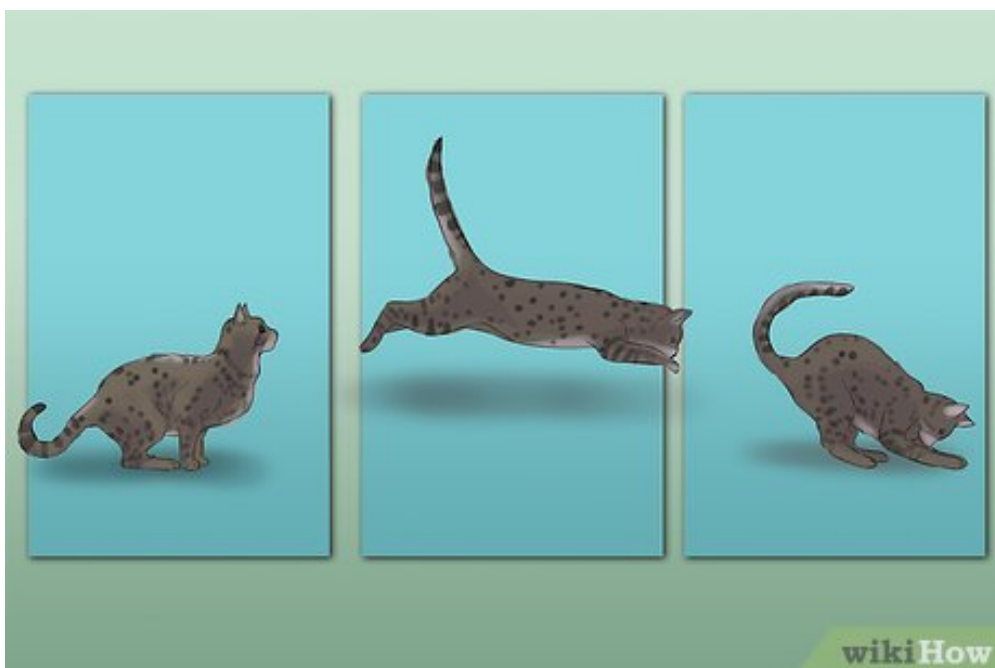
- You should set the shutter speed somewhere around 1/250 or 1/500 and then adjust depending on how fast the animal is moving.
- Also, use a mid- to high-range F-stop—probably around F4 or higher so you can capture the animal in motion.[18]



2 Use auto-focus mode. Continuous auto-focus will keep your camera in focus as the animal moves closer or farther away. This will allow you to create sharp images even while the animal is moving.



- 3 Use blurring techniques.** This includes two main techniques. Blurring the subject with the background in focus and blurring the background with the subject in focus.^[19]
- Blurring the subject while keeping the background in focus requires you to use a slower shutter speed and steadying your camera on a tripod. This will emphasize the movement of your animal, through the use of blurring.
 - Blurring the background while focusing on the subject also requires you to use a slow shutter speed, but instead of using a tripod you pan your camera along with the movement of the animal.
 - Panning involves following your subject with your camera, matching the speed and direction of the subject.



- 4 Take a series of shots.** Shooting a sequence of quick shots while the animal is moving, will capture the animal in different stages of movement. For example, taking a series of shots while your dog is jumping to catch a ball, will allow you to capture the take off, catch, and landing in separate shots.^[20]
- This is sometimes called continuous shooting or continuous drive mode.^[21]
 - For optimal results, you should use a tripod with this option.



Expert Q&A

Question

What kind of lens is best for wildlife photography?



Coryn Kiefer Helmken
Professional Photographer
Expert Answer

When you're shooting wildlife photography, you'll usually want to use a long lens, like a 70-200 or a 300-mm lens. That way, you can be far away, but you can zoom up really close to them.

Helpful ☒ 1 Not Helpful ☐ 0

Question

How do you take a picture of an animal that's running?



Coryn Kiefer Helmken
Professional Photographer
Expert Answer

Use a mid-range or high F-stop, like F4 or higher, if you're trying to capture an animal in motion.

Helpful ☒ 1 Not Helpful ☐ 0

Question

How do I make the animal stand out?



Coryn Kiefer Helmken
Professional Photographer
Expert Answer

Try to get them where the background isn't so crowded. If you're photographing a turkey walking in a field, for instance, wait until they get out in the open—don't photograph them when they're in the brush, because then the animal won't stand out.

Helpful ☒ 1 Not Helpful ☐ 0



Tips

- Photography is a practiced art, so don't get discouraged if you struggle at first.
- When shooting domestic animals and pets, you can use the camera on your phone, a simple point-and-shoot camera, or a more advanced SLR camera.
- While working with wild animals, avoid making loud noises or sudden movements because this may scare them away.



Warnings

- Be careful around wild animals. They can be unpredictable and dangerous.

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This article was co-authored by [Coryn Kiefer Helmken](#). Coryn Kiefer Helmken is a Professional Photographer and the Owner of Coryn Kiefer Photography in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Coryn specializes in fine art portrait and wedding photography. She holds a BA in English and Visual Arts from Union College. Coryn's photography style is timeless, romantic, and clean. This article has been viewed 8,888 times.

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Co-authors: **14**
Updated: **April 8, 2021**
Views: **8,888**

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