

# BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY

ROB & GINA SWINDELL



# HOW DID WE GET STARTED IN BIRDING?

- Backyard feeders
  - Red-headed woodpeckers
  - Hummingbirds
- Magee Marsh
  - Warblers
- Chase Birds
  - Snowy owl
- Travel
  - Maine
  - Florida
  - Nebraska



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## WHY BIRDS AND BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY?

- Birds are beautiful and important part of ecosystem
- Birds are amazing– migration and behaviors
- Photographing them can take you all over the world
- Always something new, even common trails
- Time spent in nature
- Educational
- It's challenging
  - Birds often don't sit still
  - Changing and difficult light
  - Hiking with equipment, weather
  - Many are small– cropping
- Might photograph something amazing
- Captures a life moment
- Birder first, photographer second

# CAMERA EQUIPMENT

- Nikon D500
- Nikon P1000
- Tamron 18-400
- Tamron 150-600
- Teleconverter
- UV Filter
- Tripod
  - Gimbal head
- Binoculars
- Birding Tote
  - Gloves
  - Shoes/Boots
  - Rain gear
  - Hats/Sweatshirts
  - Bug/tick spray
  - Sunscreen



# NIKON D500 VS NIKON P1000

## ■ Nikon D500

- Fast 10 fps
- Good in low light– ISO up to 51,200
- 4K Video
- 20.9MP

## ■ Nikon P1000

- Amazing zoom– 125x optical zoom
  - 24-3000mm
- Need tripod at extreme focal lengths
- 16MP

## ■ Lenses

- Tamron 18-400 f4.5-6.3
- Tamron 150-600mm, f5-6.3
- Nikon 600mm, f4E
  - \$12,000
- Nikon 800mm, f5.6E
  - \$16,000

## ■ Complimentary

- Low light/flight vs Distance

# NIKON D500 AND P1000



Nikon D500. 150mm



Nikon D500. 600mm



Nikon P1000. 1078mm

## CAMERA SETTINGS

- Shutter Priority/Aperture Priority
- Manual Mode/Program Mode
- Auto ISO
- Auto/Continuous focus
- Fast SD Card
  - Lose shots due to buffering
- Settings change depending on bird/activity/camera
- Different advice, preferences, changing equipment
- Resources
  - YouTube videos
  - Lectures & workshops by wildlife photographers
  - Photography websites
  - Podcasts
  - Photography Clubs
- Professional vs Amateur

# PHOTO PROCESSING

- Lightroom
  - Most lightly edited
  - Thousands of photos
  - Exposure
  - Cropping
  - Sharpen/Noise Reduction
- Photoshop



Kirtland's Warbler, Magee Marsh  
1/1000, 600mm, ISO 640, f6.3





# PHOTO PROCESSING

- Topaz DeNoise AI



## BIRDING TIPS & TRICKS

- Fill the frame with the bird for detail
- Focus on bird's eye
- Set frame release rate as high as possible
- Approach slowly– take shot, move closer
- Learn bird behavior
- Keep composition in mind
- Patience, sit in one place and wait
- Find what works for you
- Check settings between photos
- Remember, it can be subjective



## TIP: BIRD BLINDS

- Filling the frame—most common problem
- Try to get bird-level
- Get there before the birds— come to you
- Offer food
- Don't need big lens
- Cars are good blinds



## TIP: BEWARE

- Other animals use blinds too!



## TIP: BIRDS IN FLIGHT

- Shutter speed 2000
- Continuous focus
- Dynamic area AF
- Shoot away from the sun
- Start wide to find bird, track and then zoom in



## TRICK: BIRDS IN MOTION

- Shutter speed between 1/10 & 1/30<sup>th</sup>
- Shutter priority or manual
- Use panning
- Burst mode
- Experiment with settings
- Keep bird still, background in motion

2018 Audubon  
Competition  
winner



Jess Findlay  
Photography

500mm, F16  
.6 sec, ISO 100

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## TIP: PERSPECTIVE

- Unusual bird, what kind of bird is it?
- Not sharp, noisy
- Scholarship to Hog Island, drive to Maine, camp with other birders, boat trip out to Easter Egg Rock



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## TYPES OF BIRD PHOTOGRAPHS

- Documentation
  - Record of seeing bird or ID
  - Event or Travel
- Capture behavior
  - Activities of daily life
    - Building nests
    - Caring for young
    - Eating
    - Defending territory
- Creative & Artistic
  - Silhouettes
  - Black & White
  - Birds in flight
  - Sunrise & Sunset
  - Bokeh



## DOCUMENTATION PHOTO



**Brown booby. Nimisila Reservoir**  
1/500, 450mm, ISO 100, f7.1



**Painted bunting. Florida**  
1/2000, 320mm, f5.6, ISO 3200

## DOCUMENTATION PHOTO



Sandhill crane migration, Nebraska 2020



Great horned owl taking over Bald eagle nest.  
Florida 2019 600mm, 1/1000, f/11, ISO 800

## DOCUMENTATION PHOTO



**Little blue heron, Florida 2019**  
1/1000, 320mm, ISO 1100, f5.6



**Florida scrub jay. Florida 2020**  
1/1000, 600mm, ISO160, f6.3

## DOCUMENTATION PHOTO



**Short-eared owl. Killdeer Plains**  
1/640, 600mm, ISO 12800, f8



**Sandhill crane. Florida**  
1/200, 98mm, ISO 400, f5

## CAPTURE BEHAVIOR



Building a nest. CVNP, Great blue heron  
1/2000, 460mm, ISO 560, f6.3



Protecting a nest. Sandy Ridge  
1/1000, 350mm, ISO 800, f6

## CAPTURE BEHAVIOR



**Building a nest. Young Baltimore oriole**  
1/800, 400mm, ISO 640, f6.3



**Eating. Great blue heron, Florida**  
1/1000, 600mm, ISO 120, f6.3

## CAPTURE BEHAVIOR



**Eating in flight. Tern, Florida**  
1/1000, 240mm, ISO 100, f7.1

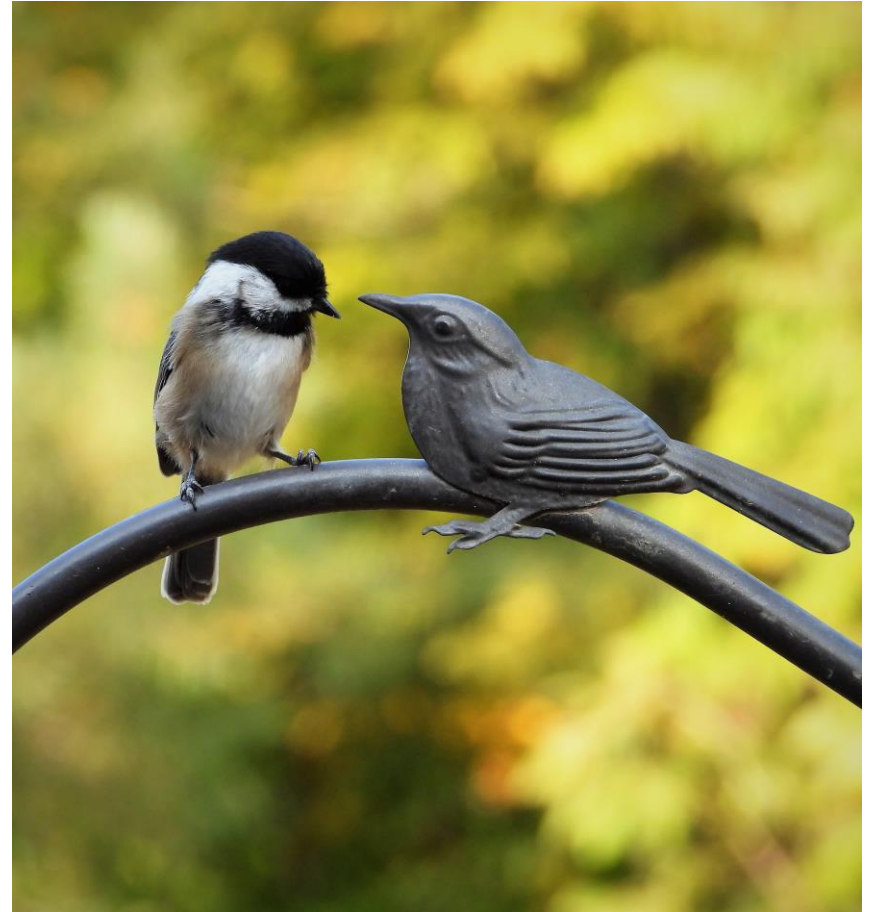


**Goslings cuddling. Sandy Ridge Reservation**  
1/2000, 280mm, ISO 1600, f5.6

## CAPTURE BEHAVIOR



**Glossy ibis argument. Florida 2019**  
1/1000, 600mm, ISO 800, f11



**Black-capped Chickadee and friend.**  
1/250, 66mm, ISO 280, f5



## CREATIVE & ARTISTIC



**Sunset silhouette. White egret, Howard's Marsh**  
1/1000, 460mm, ISO 800, f8



**Swainson's thrush. Magee Marsh**  
1/1000, 460mm, ISO 1600, f6.3

## CREATIVE & ARTISTIC



Common ravens. 1/200, 240mm, ISO 400, f10



Bird leaves B&W. Ottawa Wildlife Refuge  
1/1500, 240 mm, ISO 400, f6.7

## CREATIVE & ARTISTIC



White ibis, Orlando Wetlands Park, Florida 2020  
1/1000, 170mm, ISO 200, f5.6



Red-breasted nuthatch, Home  
1/125, 252 mm, ISO 400, f5.6

## CREATIVE & ARTISTIC



**Tufted titmouse.**  
1/160, 167 mm, ISO 400, f5.6



**Great blue heron, Selective color.**  
1/1000, 360mm, ISO 200, f6

## CREATIVE & ARTISTIC



**American kestrel.**  
1/320, 270mm, ISO 125, f5.6



**Ospreys.**  
1/1000, 450mm, ISO 2000, f6

## BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY ETHICS

- Priority is the safety of the bird
- Use telephoto lens or blinds
- If you caused the bird to fly, you were too close
- Never use flash on nocturnal birds



1/1000,  
360mm,  
ISO 1800,  
f22

- Don't use live bait to attract raptors
  - Cruel and can change animal behavior
- Respect property rights and other photographers
- Birds are protected by Migratory Bird Treaty Act
- Identify birds photographed in captivity

# CHRONICLE TELEGRAM COLUMN “BIRDING”

- Started in March 2020
- Photographs bring the story to life
- Share love of birds and nature
  - Promote education & conservation
  - Promote local events & happenings
- Chance to share photos in newspaper
- Every other Friday in the Outdoors Section

## OUTDOORS



Above, hundreds of Sandhill Cranes feed in a Nebraska field.

Right, Sandhills communicate by performing their impressive dance.

Far right, the red cap on the head of the Sandhill Crane is actually a bald spot.



ROB SWINDELL / CHRONICLE PHOTOS

## The magic of the Sandhills

Each March, over half a million Sandhill Cranes, about 60 percent of the world population, stop in Kearney, Neb., along the Platte River as part of their migration from the southern United States and Mexico to the northern United States and Canada. The congregation of these large and beautiful birds in such a small area is regarded as one of the great spectacles of bird migration.

Known as the Nebraska flyway, the river is a bottleneck of migrating birds looking to safely increase their energy reserves before continuing their migration. The shallow river provides protection from predators who make their presence known if they try to enter the water. They arrive in March and stay until early April before heading out to their nesting destination.

Witnessing half a million cranes along the river has been called by many a spiritual experience. The sound of the cranes on the river is deafening, as loud as any sporting event you will ever hear.

Each sunrise the cranes leave the river for the Nebraska fields, scouring up all the corn that was left behind from the previous year's crop. Then each sunset, the huge flocks descend into the river where they stand in



ROB SWINDELL

between 15 to 25 years in the wild. The cranes lay two eggs but too often only one chick survives, as the older chick will try to kill the younger one. Older and more experienced crane parents learn to separate them to enable the survival of both chicks. Once hatched, the chicks only have eight weeks to grow and get ready to migrate south.

Crane parents will stay with their young for an entire year and teach them how to find food and eat. They will also teach them how to dance. As one can imagine, it's unforgettably adorable to watch a young bird learn how to dance.

Fortunately, you don't have to go to Nebraska to see a Sandhill Crane. At the Sandy Ridge Reservation in North Ridgeville, there is a crane couple that has been nesting since 2000. They likely don't migrate far — leaving each December and returning in early March. Sadly, it seems the female is infertile. Each year, and now with her second mate, she lays eggs and rests upon them—without success. It's heartbreaking to observe her fruitless effort each year.

And then there's Kevin. He is one of a few visiting cranes over the last couple years. Well known to local birders who visit the reservation, Kevin is an adorable

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Sandhill who is charismatic and curious. He stayed here throughout the winter, hanging out with Canada Geese. He acts like a “Florida” bird, which is a population of Sandhill Cranes that are too friendly with people, often hanging out in backyards in Florida. They are the result of breeding efforts in which the cranes became imprinted on people.

Whether you take the pilgrimage to the Platte River in Nebraska or look for them at Sandy Ridge Reservation, Sandhill Cranes are an amazing species of bird to experience.

### Sightings

Several Harlequin ducks have been in the area this winter/spring. The stunning duck is normally found in western Canada and Alaska, in Greenland, and along the Atlantic coast.

A Great Cormorant recently returned to the area, visiting Wendy Park in Cleveland. The cormorant is scarcely found along the New England coast.

### Calendar

The Black River Audubon monthly programs are cancelled until further notice due to the coronavirus.

Contact Rob Swindell at [robports@chronicle.com](mailto:robports@chronicle.com).





## MORE THAN JUST THE BIRDS

- Birding includes everything you might see while birding
  - Other animals & insects
  - Trees & plants
  - Landscapes & water
  - History and culture
  - Travel

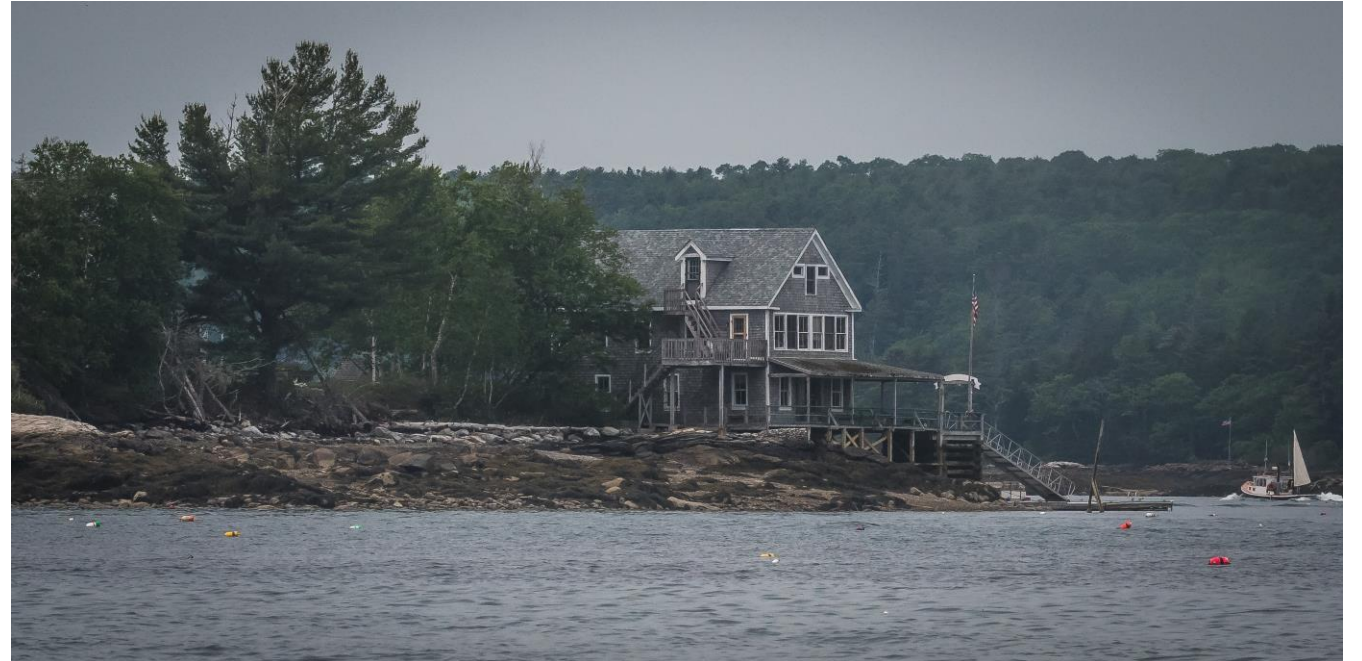


## MORE THAN JUST THE BIRDS



## PHOTO VIDEO: HOG ISLAND, MAINE

- Put photos in a video
- Use photographs to tell a story
- Add music
- Memorialize trips & vacations
- Easy to share on YouTube





Chocklist



**Lorain County Metroparks  
Carlisle Visitor Center**

**October 2021  
Photo Exhibition  
Rob & Gina Swindell**