

PHOTO

Guarantees

1 Use A Tripod For Sharper Landscapes

By Mike Stensvold

If you mount your camera on a tripod and focus carefully, you'll get sharper landscape photos—guaranteed. Why? Because a good tripod holds a camera steadier than a person can. And tripods aren't just for large-format and super-telephoto shooters: Even if you shoot with a "little" 35mm or digital SLR and never use a long lens, you'll still get sharper photos if you mount your camera on a sturdy tripod.

Using a tripod improves image sharpness several ways:

- ▶ It eliminates blur caused by camera shake (allowing you to shoot at slower shutter speeds).

- ▶ Slower shutter speeds allow you to stop down the lens (use smaller *f*-stops) to increase depth of field.

- ▶ Smaller *f*-stops minimize the image-degrading effects of lens aberrations that are most evident at wide apertures.

- ▶ You can use a low ISO rating for optimum image quality.

That's four image-improving factors for the price of one!

True, it can be inconvenient to lug around a tripod, especially when trekking to some out-of-the-way location. But most serious outdoor photographers consider the effort well worth their while because they get sharper photos that way.

Low light at sunset on a cypress swamp. To get the depth of field, a small aperture was needed, which in turn required a slow shutter speed and sturdy tripod to keep everything sharp.

While we wouldn't be so presumptuous as to say that any technique will guarantee a great photo (even the top pros' own techniques can't do that), we can offer tips that we guarantee will make a difference in your photography. You'll find four tips here—two for landscape photography, one for wildlife and one for close-ups—and we boldly guarantee that, if you use them, you'll get better photographs of those subjects.



Giotto GB 2130 Tripod

Tripod Tips

- 1** For added steadiness, especially important at shutter speeds in the $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{1}{500}$ sec. range, trip the shutter with a cable release, or the camera's two-second self-timer setting. Use the camera's mirror lockup, if it has this feature.
- 2** Extend the legs to set the camera height, then fine-tune the height using the center column (three legs are more stable than one column).
- 3** On windy days, hang your camera bag from the centerpost to weight the tripod for added stability.

Some photographers resist tripods because using one takes away the compositional freedom of the handheld camera. But there's a simple solution for that: Compose handheld, then use the tripod to hold the camera in the desired spot. The tripod locks in your composition so you can study it carefully, and it ensures that you don't accidentally change the composition as you squeeze off the shot. You'll have fewer mis-cropped images if you use a tripod when you shoot.



Focus On The Eyes For More Intimate Wildlife Photos **2**

Text And Photography By Mike Stensvold

There's a place for wildlife photos that emphasize teeth, antlers, fur and feathers, but you'll get the most intimate animal portraits when focus is on the eyes. **Here's how:**

- ▶ If the subject has a long snout or bill, try to frame its head at an angle instead of straight on to minimize depth-of-field requirements.
- ▶ When you must shoot straight on, stop down the lens to increase depth of field. Wide-open, selective-focus portraits, where only the eyes are sharp, can be effective, but the average viewer is more comfortable with images where most of the face is sharp.
- ▶ Focus manually for eye shots because AF systems most likely focus on the nose

Watch the subject for a bit to see how the light falls on the eye(s) as it turns its head. A slight change in head angle can add lots of life to the eye when the light hits it just right.



**Tamron SP AF200-500mm
f/5-6.3 Di LD (IF)**

or beak instead of the eyes, that being closer to the camera. You can use single-point AF and select a point that falls over an eye, but that takes time, and wild critters seldom hold a pose while you fumble with the camera.

- ▶ Avoid “bull’s-eye” compositions, where the eyes of the animal are always dead center in the image. Like portraits of people, animal headshots work best when done from near the subject’s eye level.

Consider these points when photographing:

- ▶ Shooting from human eye level gives photos a “snapshot” look. Novices almost always shoot from there.
- ▶ Shooting down on a smaller subject lessens its importance. You’re literally “looking down” on it.
- ▶ Shooting up at a subject gives it an imposing appearance, which can be effective with imposing subjects, but you tend to lose eye contact.
- ▶ Shooting from the subject’s eye level provides that “looking ’em straight in the eye” impact.

You can get tight shots of animals by using a long lens or by moving closer. With wild animals, we usually use a long lens—moving closer is often impossible and sometimes dangerous.



Backlight Guarantees Dramatic And Dimensional Landscapes 3

Text And Photography By Rob Sheppard

While the use of light is a core technique for any type of photography, backlighting is something you definitely want to master for photographing the landscape. Backlight is the pros’ light. It can be challenging to use, true, but use it like the pros, and the results make your landscape photos come to vibrant life.

Backlight has several important effects on a landscape photo:

- ▶ **Backlight dramatizes the subject.**

Looking into the light makes highlights and shadows vivid and dramatic. Any contrast there is intensified, making the scene more striking (although it can get harsh and

unattractive if you’re not careful how you use the contrast in your composition).

▶ **Backlight adds dimension.** Whenever you can separate elements in a scene, from ridges to hillsides to rocks, the landscape gains dimension and form. Because backlight is a light of highlights and shadows, it does this naturally and quite well.

▶ **Backlight makes colors glow.** Plants with translucent leaves and flowers gain a radiant brilliance that sets them off in the scene.

▶ **Use the sun.** Having the sun in the photo is dramatic, especially if you’re using a wide-angle lens and stop down your lens so you get a diffraction pattern (“star-



Most lenses come with lens shades. While they can help with backlit images, they can’t prevent flare when the sun is actually in the picture.

**Pentax smc P-DA
18-55mm f/3.5-5.6**

burst”; use $f/16$ or $f/22$). Use any flare that results from the sun, too, to add some life to dark areas. But don’t stare at the sun too long through your viewfinder.

▶ **Backlight increases contrast.** Contrast can be helpful in bringing life to a photo on days that have less contrast. Just shoot toward the brightest light.

When you shoot toward the sun, the right exposure can be harder to achieve, increased contrast can cause problems, and flare may become distracting. Here’s how to deal with these challenges:

▶ **Exposure.** Expose for the highlights or bright parts of the scene. Bracket your exposure by giving the shot several different exposures to make it lighter or darker. With digital, check your LCD to see if the colors look right and watch for blinking highlight warnings. Enlarge the image and learn to use the histogram.

▶ **Increased contrast.** Train yourself to see when the contrast is too harsh for the photograph by taking lots of photos. Compare images and see what you like and dislike.

▶ **Flare.** Use the lens shade that came with your lens (or buy one if you don’t have one). This helps keep the sun off the lens, reducing or eliminating flare. Try blocking flare with your hand or a hat, too, but make sure they don’t get into your photo!



Shoot Through Your Subject For Striking Flower Close-Ups

4

Text And Photography By Rob Sheppard

If you look at many close-up photos (and we see a lot of them at *OP*), you'll quickly notice that most are shot in quite similar ways, from above or slightly above the subject and almost always with more, rather than less depth of field. There's nothing wrong with doing that, but you'll miss the chance to see a subject in new ways and you'll only capture the same things that everyone else is photographing.

A quick and easy technique that gives flower photos a sensuous, colorful quality is to shoot so that you sight your lens through the flowers themselves. Instead of moving as usual to give a clear view of your subject, deliberately find an angle that includes flowers that partially block your view. If you aren't careful, however, that's all the photo will look like—blobs of nothing blocking your view. **Here's how to capture this soft, colorful effect:**

▶ **Limit your depth of field.** Shallow depth of field is critical for this effect. You want the flowers that are "in the way" to

be out of focus. The next two tips especially help give you shallow focus.

▶ **Use a telephoto focal length.** Telephotos of 100-200mm and more restrict focus up close. Many telephotos or zoom telephotos don't focus close enough. Use achromatic close-up lenses (available from Canon, Century Optics, Hoya and Nikon) or extension tubes (available from camera and lens manufacturers, as well as Kenko and Adorama).

▶ **Shoot wide open.** Don't stop down your lens. Use the widest lens opening possible (small numbers such as $f/2.8$, $f/4$ or $f/5.6$).

▶ **Focus carefully.** Be sure to find something that should be sharp, keep it clear of the blurry colors and focus so it's sharp.

▶ **Turn off your autofocus.** If you use autofocus, you'll find it wants to focus on all the wrong things because you're shooting through objects that it wants to make sharp.



Adorama Pro Optic Extension Tubes

Extension tubes are a great way to focus closer with telephoto lenses. This will let you limit depth of field for images with soft color, like this shot of showy evening primrose in Texas Hill Country.

▶ **Be sure the close flowers have color.** That is, be sure they're in a light that shows off their color. If the flowers you're shooting through are in the shade and the rest of your photo isn't, they will be dark, dull blobs. This is a great technique for cloudy days. It makes the flowers look soft and colorful. **OP**