



PHOTO MASTERCLASS

PART 12: BREAK ALL THE RULES



Rules were made to be broken. So play with blur, relish clutter, crop out your subject and discover the dark. If you ignore the protocols of photography, you may just create a masterpiece, says **Mark Carwardine**.

Rules are a great starting point when developing your skills and growing as a wildlife photographer. Keeping it simple, getting down low, the rule of thirds and all the other tricks of the trade we've been studying over the past year really will help to improve the quality of your images.

Yet none of these protocols is sacrosanct. Who says that clutter can't make a good picture, that you always have to shoot at eye level or that every animal must sit squarely on a point of power? It's invaluable to have rules, but professional photographers break them all the time to get the shot they want.

The most important thing is to understand how rules work

and why they are important before you start breaking them, because people who look at your images will soon be able to tell if you have done something intentionally or by mistake. But then you need to be free to let your imagination run wild.

It's all about thinking outside the box and experimenting. It won't always work – in fact, it *often* won't work – but when it does, you will have created something really eye-catching and different.

So this month we'll be breaking all the rules, developing our own individual styles and remembering the golden rule of wildlife photography: it's not what you photograph, it's the way that you do it.

▲ BE ORIGINAL
Once you've learned the rules of nature photography, it is great fun learning to break them. Try photographing from an unusual angle, as I've done with this Australasian gannet.

1 FOCUS ON THE FEATURES

DAVID TIPLING UK



One way to push the boundaries of creativity is to concentrate on an animal's most distinctive feature. That's exactly what David has done with this portrait of a Philippine tarsier. It may be one of the smallest primates in the world, but it does have the largest eye-to-body ratio of all mammals.

"When you are looking for tarsiers, the first thing you notice is those disproportionately big eyes staring out through the foliage," says David. "I wanted to capture the essence of that in a single photograph."

David has focused on just one eye for even greater impact. He has also cropped out the rest of the animal, filling the space with foliage.

► www.davidtipling.com

TECHNICAL SPECS

Nikon D3 + 17–35mm lens; 1/30 sec at f3.2; ISO 400

David's shot of a Philippine tarsier shouts 'eye', and highlights the species' most distinctive feature as well as its secretive nature.



2 FIND MAGIC IN MAYHEM

PÅL HERMANSEN NORWAY



Few gull images have the energy and excitement of Pål's striking flight-shot of black-legged kittiwakes in Norway's Lofoten Islands. It may be blurry and chaotic, with most of the main bird out of frame and the head of a second blocked from view, but it's dynamic and powerful, and really stands out from the crowd.

"Real life isn't always neatly structured and well ordered – it's often quite shambolic," explains Pål, "and that's exactly how a flock of eager gulls appears to me. I wanted to capture how it might feel to be a bird among the throng, which meant breaking a few photographic rules. I like to experiment with the accidental chaos of motion, where I don't have full control over every element of the image. I prefer these shots to perfectly composed ones."

► <http://palhermansen.com>

TECHNICAL SPECS

Canon EOS-1D Mark II + 16–35mm lens; 1/60 sec at f9; ISO 100; flash



The fact that you can see a third gull clearly, and others flying around in the distance, satisfies the need for some sort of order in an otherwise abstract image.

3 THINK DARK THOUGHTS

PETER CAIRNS UK



Can a picture be dominated by black? Judging by Peter's wonderfully unusual shot of a coot, it can. This is clearly not a black and white photo – there is colour in the light, in the coot's plumage and in its familiar red eye – yet more than 90 per cent of it is pitch black.

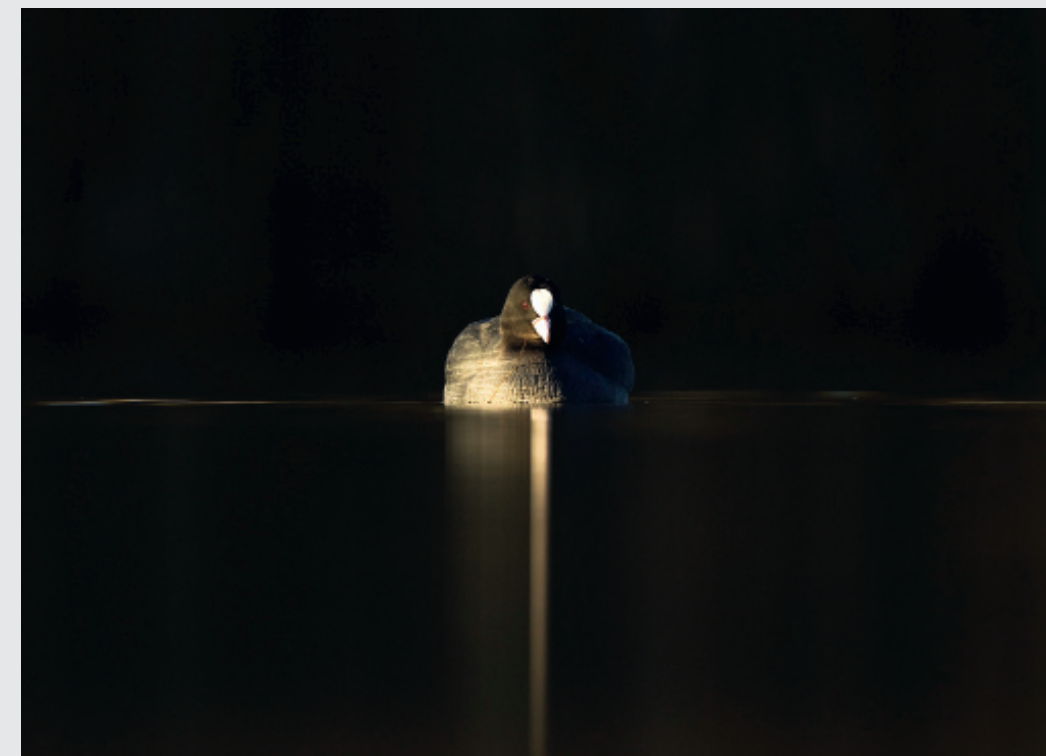
"The light on this particular day was gorgeous," says Peter. "It lit up the coot's dark plumage just enough to lift it from the background. I like the way its white frontal shield is reflected in the water, forming a vertical line right down the centre of the frame."

Note also the faint horizontal white line at the water's surface. This anchors the coot, so it doesn't look as if it's floating in mid-air.

► www.northshots.com

TECHNICAL SPECS

Canon EOS-1D Mark IV + 500mm lens; 1/1250 sec at f4; ISO 200



In addition to creating a striking portrait of a coot, the blackness also accentuates the bird's most distinct feature – its white frontal shield.

4 CAPTURE THE CHARACTER

EDWIN GIESBERS THE NETHERLANDS

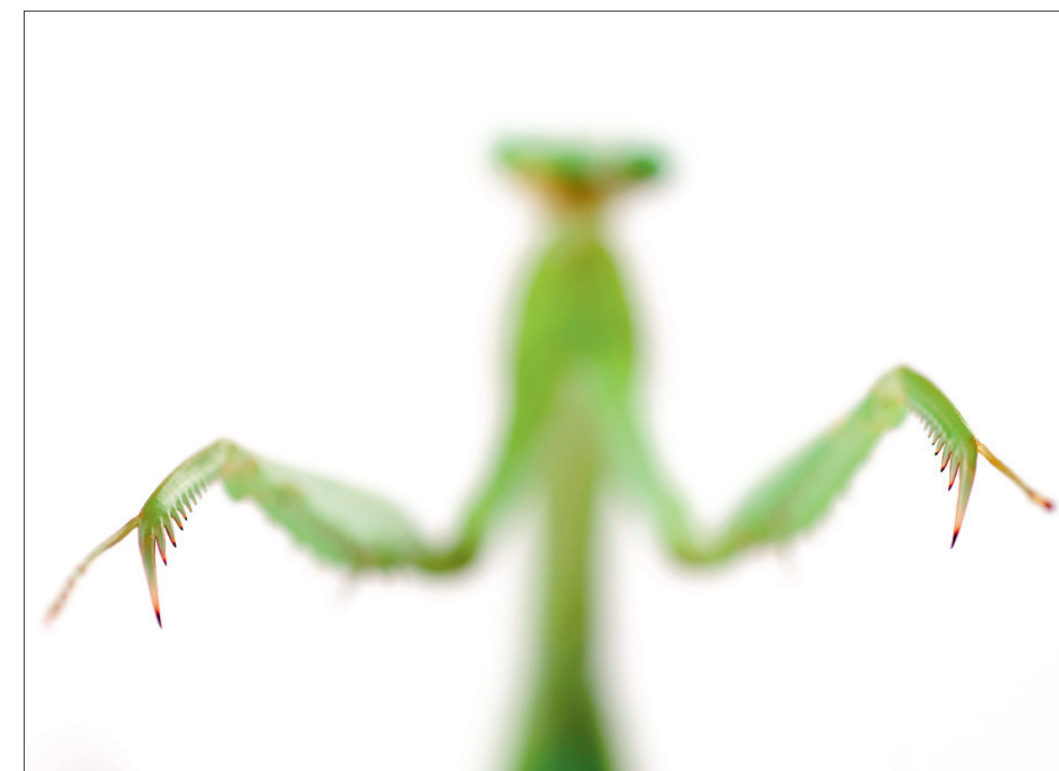


Distinctive subjects lend themselves to a little extra creativity, offering the chance to highlight or even exaggerate their most striking features in unusual ways.

"I wanted to give a prey's-eye view of a praying mantis," explains Edwin. "By focusing on those archetypal spiked forelegs, I was able to show the last thing a hapless insect might see just before it is seized."

Your eyes are drawn straight to the insect's forelimbs because they are the only sharp parts of the image. You can immediately identify which animal they belong to – even though its head and body are completely out of focus – because praying mantises are so distinctive. A picture like this wouldn't work nearly as well if the animal wasn't instantly recognisable.

► www.edwinguiesbers.com



TECHNICAL SPECS

Nikon D300 + 90mm macro lens; 1/100 sec at f7.1; ISO 200; tripod; flash

A white background makes the mantis stand out, and adds a comic touch – the insect looks as if it's emerging from a wall of mist.

REALLY BREAKING THE RULES

Now you know the rules, let your creativity run wild for an even better picture.



Shooting through a blurry wall of foliage should be a no-no – but here it creates an unusual, spy's-eye portrait of greylag geese.

5 CHALLENGE YOUR VIEWER

JAN-PETER LAHALL SWEDEN



Jan-Peter is renowned for pushing the boundaries of wildlife photography. He takes plenty of traditional images, but is best known for throwing away the rule book and letting his imagination run wild.

This delightfully off-the-wall picture of greylag geese in Tysslingen, Sweden, is a good

example of his unique and recognisable style. "I was able to get a clear view of the geese," he says, "and I did take a number of more conventional pictures by shooting across the open snow. But I wanted to capture something more unusual, so I moved to a different position and shot through the trees instead."

There is one key ingredient to this image – the goose on the right. If this bird wasn't clearly visible through the branches, the picture wouldn't work so well. It's

a very abstract image – one that most photographers probably wouldn't have noticed – yet Jan-Peter has made sure that it's immediately obvious what you are looking at.

There is, however, a limit. You have to be careful not to become so ridiculously creative that your pictures leave the viewer frustrated and confused.

► www.lahall.com

TECHNICAL SPECS

Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III + 500mm lens; 1/500 sec at f5.0; ISO 200

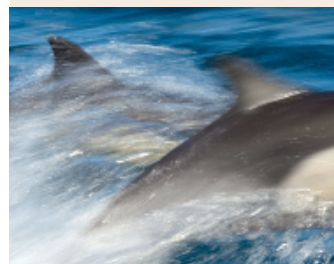
TRICKS OF THE TRADE

► SWAP PLACES

Try intentionally breaking one rule at a time. For example, experiment by placing your subjects in the centre or close to the edge of the frame rather than on a power point.

► WATCH THIS SPACE

One interesting rule to break is the use of 'dead' space. Have your subjects flying, running, walking or swimming (*below*) out of open space rather than into it.



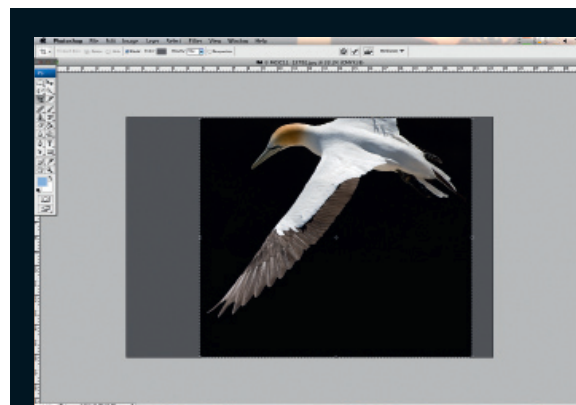
► FIND AN AUDIENCE

Bear in mind that many of the most creative images are loved by some people but hated by others – reactions are subjective.

► KNOW YOUR LIMITS

Don't give up the rules altogether. After all, they are designed to make pictures aesthetically pleasing.

Mark Carwardine

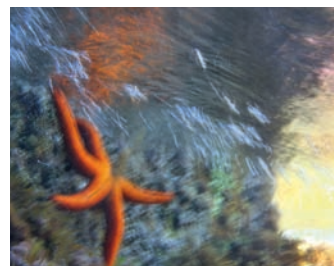


CUT TO FIT: CHANGE THE RATIO



Don't forget to play around with the aspect ratio of your pictures. Just because 35mm film and digital sensors are proportioned 3x2, it doesn't mean to say that all photos have to be the same. They could be square, letterbox or – if you're being really radical – round. It all depends on the subject and the effect you are trying to achieve. Artists don't restrict themselves to standard dimensions, so why should photographers? Simply use the Crop tool in software such as Lightroom or Photoshop to see what works best.

ON OUR WEBSITE



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► DiscoverWildlife.com

Marco Colombo

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