



Mark Carwardine

PHOTO MASTERCLASS

PART 10: GIVE IT SOME BLUR



Every wildlife photographer's portfolio should include a bit of

blur. Used in the right way, blur conveys movement, pace, drama and a sense of journey, bringing still images to life, says **Mark Carwardine**.

Mark Carwardine regularly presents BBC natural-history programmes, and is a photographer, writer and conservationist.

Surely blurring your photos is a contradiction? We've just been told that more images are ruined by a lack of sharpness than almost anything else ('Hold steady', Photo Masterclass, Autumn), and we've just got to grips with keeping our images pin-sharp. Yet now we are talking about making them blurred.

But there is a big difference between pictures that lack critical sharpness due to bad photography and those that have been blurred for creative purposes. Nature photographers use blur deliberately to accentuate speed (blur implies pace, even if the animal is moving relatively slowly) and to convey a sense of movement, which can otherwise be a

challenging concept to get across in a still image.

The ideal shutter speed for intentional blurring varies according to the subject and the effect that you are trying to achieve. As a very rough guideline, start with 1/15 second for wildlife and 10 seconds for water, and then use trial and error to find what works best for you.

Sometimes, the decision to give it some blur is made for you. If there is very little available light, for instance, you can turn it to your advantage by shooting with slow shutter speeds. But it's also good to experiment with blur, whatever the weather. Either way, this month we'll be getting creative and slowing down.

▲ MAKE A SPLASH

It's always worth experimenting with slow shutter speeds when you're shooting a fast-moving animal, such as this bottlenose dolphin in Mexico.

1 WORK WITH WATER

LAURIE CAMPBELL UK



Landscape photographers often use blur to shoot waterfalls, rivers and coastal scenes, and wildlife photographers can harness the same effect. "You need a tripod or beanbag to capture an image like this," says Laurie. "The camera needs to be steady in order to keep the grey seal sharp, while still allowing a sufficiently long shutter speed to blur the waves crashing over it."

Blur works well in bad weather, too. Bearing in mind the old adage that 'bad weather makes good photography', you should continue shooting in rain or snow, using a slow shutter speed to capture the precipitation (rain and snowdrops appear as short streaks).

► www.lauriecampbell.com

TECHNICAL SPECS

Nikon D3 + 200–400mm lens;
1/15 sec at f7.1; ISO 800



Slow shutter speeds work well with water, creating a wonderfully ethereal effect. The longer the exposure, the mistier the look.



Slight blurring of the water enables you to 'see' the current that these salmon are swimming against, creating a sense of exertion and endurance.

TECHNICAL SPECS

Nikon D700 + 15mm fisheye lens;
1/8 sec at f20; ISO 250

2 GO WITH THE FLOW

ALEX MUSTARD UK



Blur can be equally effective underwater. As well as capturing the sense of an animal swimming along a river or stream, it also changes the visual impact of the water itself. It gives a feeling of flow, but adds a soft, pastel quality. The slower the shutter speed, the silkier and smoother the water appears and the more elegant the overall effect.

"If you photograph water at a fast shutter speed it can look surprisingly hard and brittle, and that's not how it is in real life," says Alex. "By slowing down the shutter speed, I have added a new dimension to this picture of sockeye salmon in the Adams River, Canada. I've been able to show the current visually, and therefore give a sense of the challenge the fish face when swimming upstream to spawn."

► www.amustard.com



3 FOCUS AND FOLLOW

THORSTEN MILSE GERMANY



Panning (or tracking) is an essential skill in wildlife photography. You follow the

movement of an animal with your camera in such a way that it remains as sharp as possible while the background becomes blurred. The result is very different to softening an otherwise fussy or distracting backdrop by selecting a narrow depth of field – it still makes the subject 'pop', but also adds a sense of movement and speed.

"Panning works best when the animal is travelling perpendicular to you, from one side to the other," explains Thorsten, who took this impressionistic image of an Indian tiger. "Pre-focus your camera and pan the action as it passes."

► www.wildlifephotography.de

TECHNICAL SPECS

Canon EOS-1D Mark II + 200mm lens; 1/13 sec at f10; ISO 320

For an effective tracking image, both you and your subject must be in motion. Start panning before you expect to shoot.

4 TRY OUT NEW TECHNIQUES

KONRAD WOTHE GERMANY



There are other ways to create a sense of movement in an image. It's all about having fun and experimenting.

"I wanted to convey the explosion of wings when thousands of snow geese take to the air en masse," says Konrad of his unusual shot from Bosque del Apache, New Mexico, USA. "I experimented with different blurring techniques and particularly liked the effect of zooming my lens in or out as I took the picture. There is no magic formula, so it's important to try a variety of shutter speeds and zooming speeds to find the combination that works best."

Alternatively, move your camera up and down or side to side. Have a particular feel in mind – for example, as if you've brushed colour across your picture.

► www.konrad-wothe.de



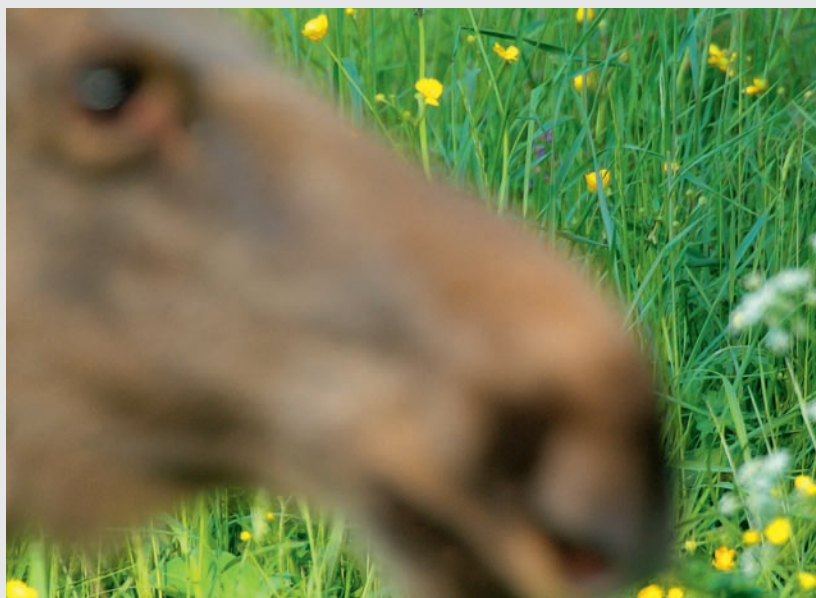
TECHNICAL SPECS

Canon EOS-1D Mark II + 70–200mm lens; 1/40 sec at f18; ISO 50

Blurred by zoom, Konrad's snow geese morph into streaks. The movement is simultaneously directed to all four corners of the image, giving a real feeling of energy.

BREAKING THE RULES

Once you know the rules, bending them can result in a better picture.



Here, Pål has chosen to blur the moose's head. The three-dimensional effect is simultaneously striking and comical.

5 BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES

PÅL HERMANSEN NORWAY



This is an extreme example of blur – a deliberate act of rebellion against conventional approaches to nature photography. About as daring an interpretation of a moose as it's possible to get, it has nothing to do with traditional motion blur and everything to do with blur for its own sake.

By pushing the boundaries and shocking the viewer, Pål has captured a memorable picture with high impact. "It's fun to challenge preconceptions," he says. "When you're being creative, who says you have to do everything by the book? People tend to think that only sharply focused photographs – or those with blur to show movement – are acceptable, but it's much more fun to think outside the box."

Whether you are shooting motion blur or being provocative with it, the technique usually

works best with subjects that are already familiar to the viewer. In this case, the moose is instantly recognisable, even though it's completely out of focus.

It is also important to achieve just the right amount of blur. Too much and it can be difficult to identify the subject, too little and it will look as if you missed the focus point or accidentally kicked your tripod.

► www.palhermansen.com

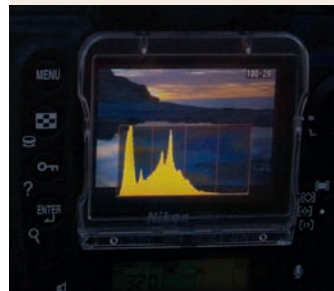
TECHNICAL SPECS

Canon EOS-1D Mark IV + 500mm lens + 2x converter; 1/160 sec at f10; ISO 640

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

► CHECK YOUR TECHS

To blur the activity in a scene, select 'shutter priority mode', choose an appropriately slow shutter speed, and let your camera determine the best aperture automatically.



► APPLY YOUR DATA

Shooting long exposures can run the risk of over-exposing. To make sure that an image is exposed correctly, check the histogram (above) on your camera's display – avoid peaks at the far right of the graph.

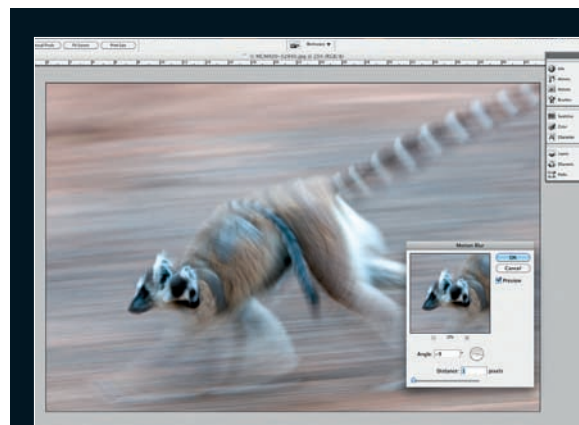
► PREPARE FOR PANNING

Practise your tracking shots with obliging cyclists, joggers and walkers. Dogs are also good test subjects.

► PLAY WITH YOUR TOYS

If your lens features image stabilisation or vibration reduction, use them.

National Geographic Image Collection/Alamy



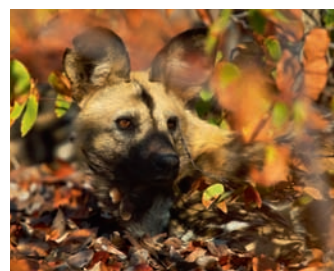
Blurring images in Photoshop may be simple, but they never look as good as when you get it right in-camera.

COLOUR VISION: IT'S EASY TO CHEAT



Some photographers use motion blur or lens blur filters in digital processing software, such as Photoshop, to add or enhance blur. It's relatively easy to do – in its simplest form, you select the area you wish to blur and adjust the dial until you achieve the desired effect. But it will never look quite the same as getting it right in-camera. In this era of digital photography, it is tempting to assume everything can be 'fixed' at home. But the less you have to do on the computer, the better.

ON OUR WEBSITE



Read previous Masterclasses, admire our experts' picture galleries (above) and enter our online photo contests at

► DiscoverWildlife.com

Neil Aldridge

NEXT MONTH WORK ON A PROJECT Revitalise your creativity with a single-subject obsession