



PHOTO MASTERCLASS

PART 9: LOOK FOR COLOUR



From the vivid red of a ladybird to the dazzling blue of the kingfisher, colour plays a huge part in nature photography. But it's more complex than you might think - and getting it right makes all the difference, says **Mark Carwardine**.

It seems too obvious to say that colour is important in wildlife photography, since it can make or break an image. Yet it takes a conscious effort to understand the potential impacts of different shades - and the repercussions of putting together different combinations of them in an image.

Red, for example, symbolises love, danger and heat, which is why the heart symbol, stop signs and warning notices are all red. Blue can symbolise sadness, but can also represent optimism, as in clear blue skies.

But it's more complicated than that. Some colours stand out and carry more visual weight than others - for instance, even a tiny dab of red in a picture will

shout 'Look at me!' far louder than the neighbouring hues.

And colours can literally change character when they are placed next to one another. They are also very personal, since we all have our individual favourites, and that, too, can have an impact on pictures.

The world is full of vivid, intense, soft and subtle shades across a wonderfully wide spectrum, and the scope for using them in wildlife photography is limitless.

So this month we'll be heightening our awareness of colour and discovering how we can use it to grab the viewer's attention, create special effects and even manipulate emotional responses.

▲ SEE THE LIGHT

Bathed in a rich golden glow, an ordinary portrait of a northern pintail duck is turned into a serene, almost ethereal image.

1 WORK IN HARMONY

MAURIZIO BIANCARELLI ITALY



You can create an interesting juxtaposition of colours when you combine those that are related in hue. These are known as 'harmonious colours'. When used side by side, the impact is not as bold or striking as when complementary shades are put together. Nonetheless it is very pleasing to the eye and creates a sense of order and balance.

In this atmospheric photograph, taken from a hillside overlooking a deciduous woodland in Umbria, central Italy, Maurizio has transformed a blustery autumn

Despite the fiery impact of the colours featured here, the overall impression is one of calm. Glimpses of trunks and branches prevent the image from being overly abstract.

gale into a painter's palette. "Autumn colours are the perfect example of harmony," he says. "Nature provides the soothing blend of browns, reds, oranges and yellows that dominate the landscape at this time of year. Earth hues such as these nearly always look good together."

The green leaves add to the feeling of harmony because they are pastels – simply muted, quieter versions of the primary and secondary colours. Spring, with all its shades of pale yellow, light green, pink and lavender, is the best time of year to photograph pastels.

► www.mauriziobiancarelli.net

TECHNICAL SPECS

Hasselblad 503CW + 250mm lens; 1 sec at f16; ISO 50



2 PICK OUT THE PRIMARIES

TOM SCHANDY NORWAY



Colours can be divided into two main categories: primary and secondary. The primaries – red, yellow and blue – cannot be formed by any combination of other shades. All other colours are derived from these three hues. They demand attention and have the most visual impact in a photograph.

Single points of primary colour in an otherwise monotonal scene are particularly effective, drawing the viewer's eye straight to the main point of interest.

"Red is exceptionally vibrant," says Tom, who took this striking close-up of a black grouse. "But its juxtaposition against other colours also greatly affects its dominance. In this image, the wattle above the bird's eye is set against its blue-black plumage, which makes the red look particularly hot."

► www.tomschandy.no

TECHNICAL SPECS

Canon EOS 40D + 600mm lens; 1/125 sec at f5.6; ISO 400

The lack of colour in this frame enhances the effect of the grouse's dazzlingly red wattle – it leaps right off the page.



4 PERFECT COMPLEMENTS

INGO ARNDT GERMANY



Secondary colours – green, orange and purple – can be made by mixing two of the three primary colours (red + yellow = orange; red + blue = purple; blue + yellow = green). If you mix a primary with a secondary, you get a tertiary (yellow-orange, red-orange, red-purple, blue-purple, blue-green and yellow-green), and different proportions provide an infinite number of subtle variations. But the more shades you mix together, the less visual punch they have.

Combining primaries and secondaries can produce incredibly vibrant images. "The trick is to use 'complementary' colours," says Ingo. "When used side by side they vibrate more intensely, because each colour intensifies the other. This is the case with yellow and purple, blue and orange and – as here – red and green."

► www.ingoarndt.com



TECHNICAL SPECS

Canon EOS-1Ds Mark III + 70–200mm lens; 1/45 sec at f16; ISO 200

3 MIX WARMS AND COOLS

ERLEND HAARBERG NORWAY



Colours can also be categorised by 'heat'. Warm, saturated shades – reds, yellows and oranges – tend to dominate. They appear closer and create a positive feeling of energy and vigour. Conversely, cool or 'introverted' colours – blues, greens and mauves – are more likely to hide. They seem further away and confer tranquillity and calm. This is why landscape painters use warm shades to depict foreground subjects and cool hues for distant ones.

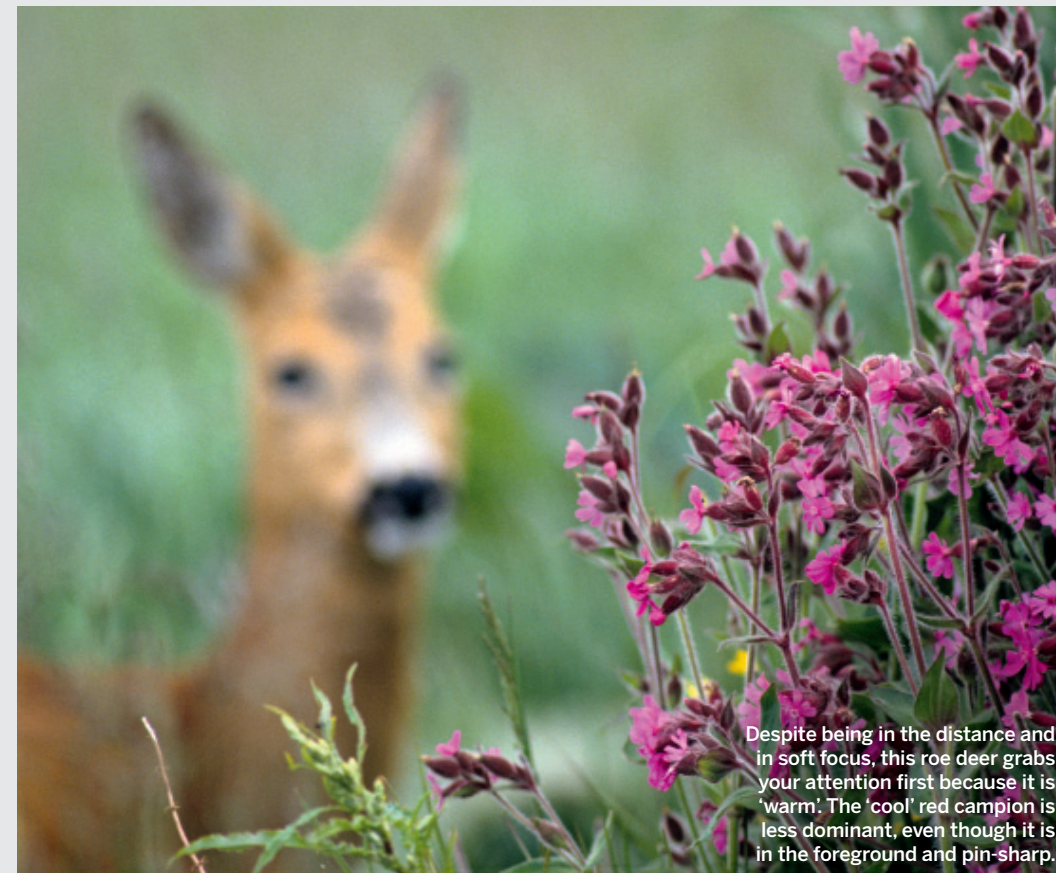
"You have to use the right combination of colours to make a picture like this work," explains Erlend, who took this intriguing shot of a roe deer. "The contrast is very important."

► www.haarbergphoto.com

TECHNICAL SPECS

Nikon F3 + 600mm lens; f5.6; ISO 100

Despite being in the distance and in soft focus, this roe deer grabs your attention first because it is 'warm'. The 'cool' red campion is less dominant, even though it is in the foreground and pin-sharp.



Red and green bounce off each other to produce brilliant, dynamic images, such as Ingo's *Grevillea*, taken in Kakadu National Park, Australia.

BREAKING THE RULES

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



Sometimes, sepia is more effective than full colour. Here, the soft tonal backdrop showcases the slender silhouettes of the flamingos.

5 TRY TONING IT DOWN

KONRAD WOTHE GERMANY



Removing colour can have its own dramatic impact. Note that this does not necessarily mean shooting in black and white (though it is true that stripping away the colour altogether can increase the power of a beautifully composed picture). However, it does mean taking photographs that do not rely on seductive or distracting shades.

"Taking most of the colour out of an image draws the viewer's attention to other features," says Konrad, who took this wonderfully graphic shot of greater flamingos in the Camargue, France. "Uniformity of colour leaves the viewer free to contemplate shape, form and texture."

You can see that Konrad has designed his photo to achieve a powerful composition with little more than a single colour and a few simple silhouettes. This isn't the kind of picture you take by chance – there is much more

to shooting monochromatic images than merely snapping without too much colour. Since you're unable to hide behind eye-catching reds, soothing blues or gorgeous greens, the impact of your photo depends on other key ingredients. You have to think more creatively, laterally and graphically to evoke different feelings and emotions – or to hit the viewer between the eyes.

► www.konrad-wothe.de

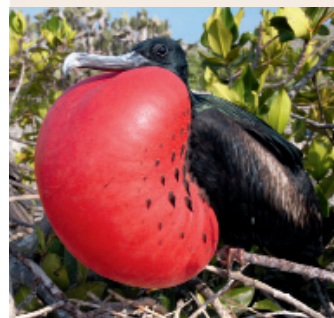
TECHNICAL SPECS

Canon EOS-1D Mark II + 400–500mm lens; 1/800 sec at f10; ISO 100

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

► PINPOINT PARTNERS

To work out a colour's 'complement', place it against some black card, stare at it, then look at some white card. The shade that you see in your mind's eye is the complementary colour. The technique works because complementary colours in their light form (rather than pigment form) produce white light when mixed together.



► PLAY AROUND

Experiment with combinations. Red, for example, appears dull with white, drab against orange but brilliant with black, such as on this frigatebird (above).

► BRIGHT VS DULL

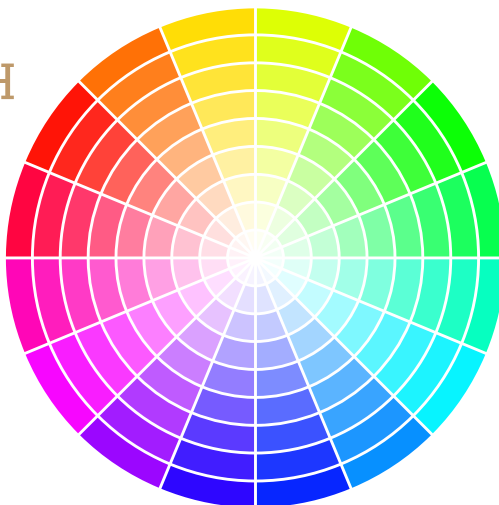
Use a polarising filter on sunny days to enrich colours, and fill-flash on gloomy days to boost and restore natural hues.

COLOUR VISION: HOW TO MIX AND MATCH

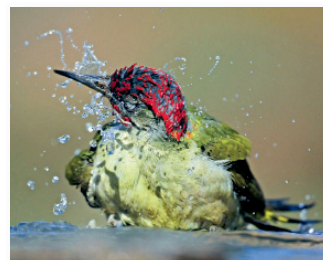
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The best way to understand the basics of colour theory is to use the 'colour wheel' of primary and secondary shades. Those opposite each other are complementary colours (red-green, orange-blue and yellow-purple); those next to each other are harmonious hues (red-orange, yellow-green, blue-purple etc).

The trick is to use shades that are either opposite or similar – not somewhere in between. The left side of the wheel contains the warm colours, the right side depicts the cool hues. Neutral colours (black, grey, white and brown) don't appear on the wheel and do not try to dominate one another.



ON OUR WEBSITE



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DiscoverWildlife.com

NEXT MONTH GIVE IT SOME BLUR Use movement to emphasise colour, shape and action