

Peter Etter – Bird Photography

Getting crisp images of uncooperative wild birds can be tricky! Yes, opportunities do occur for close encounters, from a hide perhaps, when modest photographic equipment can produce a stunning result. All too often though it is difficult (a) to get close enough and (b) to catch them stationary.

The easiest cheat is to tempt the little blighters with food or, failing that, find them feeding.

Examples of a seedeater and a carnivore:



Goldfinch on teasels



Sparrowhawk dismembering a pigeon

If you can catch up with them, there are some astonishingly attractive British birds:



Kingfisher



Bearded Reedling (aka Bearded Tit)

The more elusive characters require sophisticated (and expensive) equipment. To get an image that is not a trivial area in the captured view demands high magnification and this requires a telephoto lens.

I now use a 600mm focal length job mounted on a Nikon D7100 DSLR camera body. It helps to have plenty of sensor pixels; when optical magnification runs out, the image can be cropped down. With 24Mps to play with I can throw away 12 Mps, or more, and still have enough to produce a large, sharp print. This record shows a male peregrine (red circle on the steeple) on Chichester cathedral.



High magnification is all very well but useless if the equipment is not stable. Ever tried using x12 binoculars? This means a beefy tripod or hide clamp is needed to prevent shake. A no-holds barred target is a 600mm prime lens (no zoom) with an objective diameter of 166 mm - the size of a Tudor cannon! This could cost you multiple £K and weigh 3.8kg without the camera body!

Finally, after a retired engineer has pulled all his tricks out of the bag there is always luck. An example would be capturing two red kites in the same frame:

