



Enewsletter

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[How to Photograph Wildlife](#)

Rick Sheremeta heads out on the trails of northern Montana to capture indigenous animals with his Tamron SP 70-300mm VC USD lens.

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Images by Rick Sheremeta

Rick Sheremeta and his wife, Dody, have the perfect vantage point for photographing wildlife. There's no shortage of bears, moose, birds, and other indigenous animals in the northwestern Montana region Rick calls home, especially in nearby Glacier National Park. With his Tamron [SP 70-300mm VC USD](#) lens, Rick is able to spend long days out on the trails and come back with a memory card full of amazing images.

"This past summer, we put in more than 200 miles in Glacier Park — that's a lot of hiking!" he says. "For me, the lighter, the better. The 70-300 is a very light lens with a great focal-length range. I can shoot wildlife and also do some landscape and scenic shooting with it: If it's the only lens I've got on hand, I use it in lieu of a wide-angle lens. I just shoot a number of frames, then stitch them together to wield an effectively wider-angle shot."

Rick leaves the 70-300's Vibration Compensation (VC) feature on whenever he's on the hunt

for wildlife. “I put it on and leave it on,” he says. “I usually don’t carry a tripod, unless I know my destination is a waterfall (where’d I’d need it to shoot extra steady at 1/4 second or slower to give a silky effect to the flowing water by blurring the motion while keeping everything else tack sharp), so using the VC helps, especially when I’m shooting at a relatively slow shutter speed.”

Read on for Rick’s tips on composition, exposure, and keeping yourself (and the animals) out of harm’s way.

Put safety first when photographing wildlife.

When we hike, especially in Glacier Park, we make noise to let the animals know we’re coming. The last thing you want to do is surprise a grizzly bear, especially one with cubs. If I miss a shot because the bear has taken off, it’s better for them and better for me. A lot of times, I’ll see a bear that’s too far away to get a shot anyway — it’s just a speck in the viewfinder. I simply enjoy it, and when I’m close enough that I can get a nice image, then I’ll take advantage of it and shoot. I also carry bear spray, though I’ve only had to take it out of my holster twice when a bear got a little too uncomfortably close (and never had to discharge it).



Adjust your settings in advance.

When I come across wildlife, it’s usually sudden, so I don’t have time to play with the camera controls — I just bring it up to my eye, focus, and shoot. So I do preliminary preparation work to ensure the camera is ready. I’ll typically set my camera to Shutter Priority and my shutter speed to what I know is going to work most of the time, which is usually 1/500th of a second. I’ll set my ISO at 400, even on a sunny day since a lot of the time is in shaded woody areas.

Adjust exposure for snow-filled scenes.

On a cloudy day in winter, you can shoot all day long (even on the sunny days, the sun is so far south that the lighting’s almost always nice). I took this picture of Maggie, the younger of my two golden retrievers, at around 12:30. She’s a real ham when the camera comes out!



I usually shoot wildlife one of two ways: using spot metering or (especially for winter scenes, when the white dominates the exposure) evaluative/matrix metering. For this shot of Maggie, I could have metered on Maggie and just kept my exposure compensation at zero, but since I was shooting a lot of other things that day that also had snow in the background (which I knew would dominate the exposure), I just kept the metering on “Evaluative.” I set the exposure compensation to +1, which I almost always do when shooting in snow, and when I brought it into Lightroom, I brought the exposure up almost another full stop. Now, I could have just set my exposure compensation to +2 (and if it’s a bright winter day, I’ll do that). But on overcast days like this one, I’ll start at +1 and see how things go from there.

Focus on the eyes.

When I photograph an animal, I focus on the eyes and usually try to wait until there’s a catchlight situation or I can see a reflection in the eye. We had come around the bend of the trail we often hike on when I spotted a deer right in front of us. I could see the catchlight in the deer’s eye, and when I zoomed in on it, I could see the actual reflection of what was in back of me. With the 70-300, the detail is preserved beautifully. The image is cropped down to about 10 percent of the overall frame.



I tried to get that same catchlight when I spotted a hoary marmot, a type of large ground squirrel that lives in Glacier National Park. We had just finished our hike on the Ptarmigan Trail and were having lunch when I spotted this little guy scurrying around the rocks. They're not really spooked by humans, so I was able to focus on his eyes and patiently wait till I could get that nice catchlight.



Capture animals in motion.

We get hummingbirds in our yard every summer — they love to hang around. My wife was out one day misting the lawn when she saw this one in the spray of the hose. She called me over and held the hose up, and I just shot away. The dots you see in the image are the sun shining off of individual drops of water coming out of the spray.

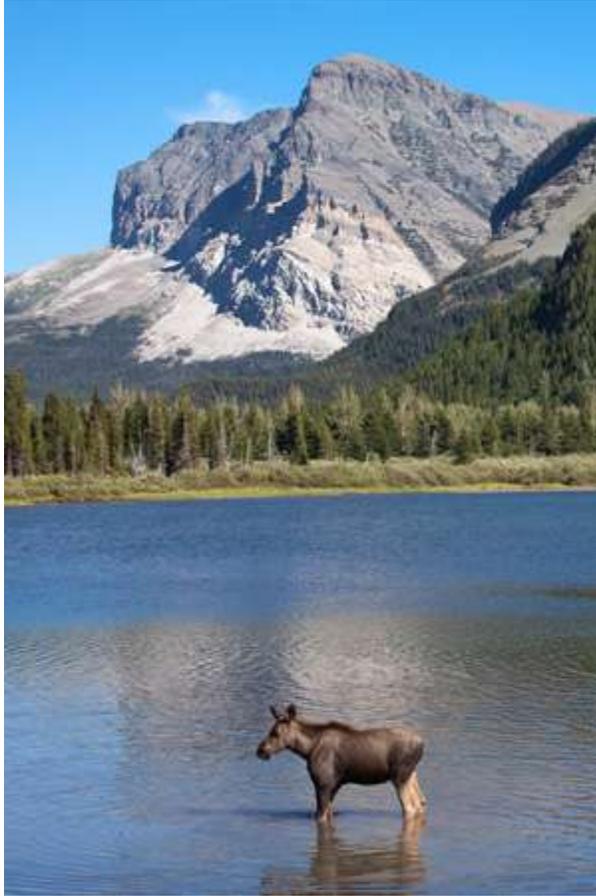


You have to shoot at an extremely high shutter speed to capture a hummingbird. I shot this at 1/2000th of a second (you can see there's still some blur in motion in the wings) and in Shutter Priority, because I wanted to maintain that shutter speed. I wasn't concerned with depth-of-field because I was zoomed in so tight.

In this case, I was shooting in Shutter Priority and had the camera metering set for spot metering. Knowing that the bird was much brighter than the dark woods background, I set the exposure compensation to +1. If I had not done this, the background would have been very light and the bird totally blown out. That exposure maintained the darkness of the background. Then, when I brought it into Lightroom, I brought the exposure down about 2/3 stop, just to provide a little more contrast between the hummingbird and background. I could have left it alone and it would still have been OK — just some artistic license on my part.

Show animals against the landscape for environmental imagery.

When I'm out in the field, I get a lot of shots that are close-ups of moose and bear and other animals, and that's really what I concentrate on. A lot of times it's not even possible to get a good environmental shot. This moose calf, though, was situated just right, so I could get the mountain in the back as part of the image. When I get that opportunity, I take advantage of it: It makes for a visually compelling shot, and it also shows scale. I'll take an image like that in both landscape and portrait formats so I've got both. I shot this in Shutter Priority at F/11 with evaluative/matrix metering and +1/3 EV since the light sky and water pretty much dominated the exposure and I wanted to maintain that brightness. I just focused on the moose and let the background do what it was going to do, knowing that it would be sharp at F/11 because of the distance from the camera to the moose calf.



Look for fleeting moments that allow you more compositional creativity.

There were twin fawns we watched all summer long. The shot I have here was taken in October when we had our first snow. It was around 4 p.m., just before the sun was going to drop over the mountains, so the light was beautiful. The fawns decided they were going to hunker down and chew their cuds in the warmth of the sun. They were totally vegged out, not moving around at all. I had time to really think about the exposure and the composition. Most of the time when you see wildlife, you're taking that picture quick, and it ends up being centered in the frame because you don't have time to compose it. But because these guys were bedded down, I had time to frame them how I wanted. I brought them over to the left-hand third of the image so they were looking into the image, which made for a great composition.



To see more of Rick Sheremeta's images, go to www.alpenglowproductions.com.