

The Art of Composition in Wildlife Photography

WORKBOOK

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After following the Masterclass “The Art of Composition in Wildlife Photography” this is a list of recommended exercises to put into practice everything we covered.

You can practically do these exercises/answer the questions or use this workbook as a guiding/reflection tool when preparing for your photo session or evaluating your own photos.

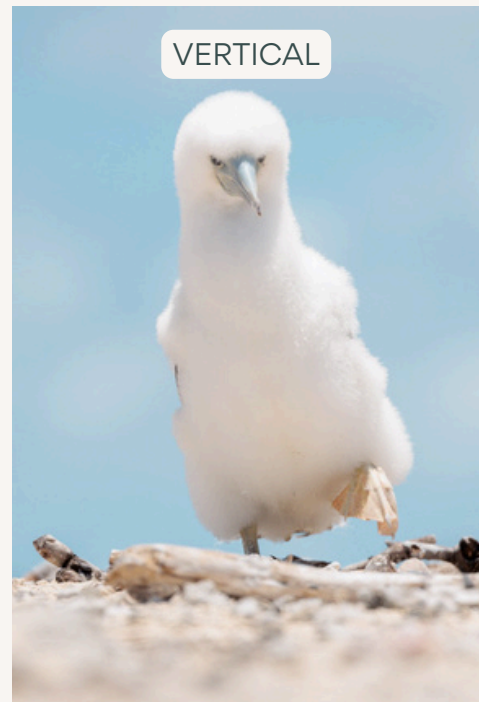
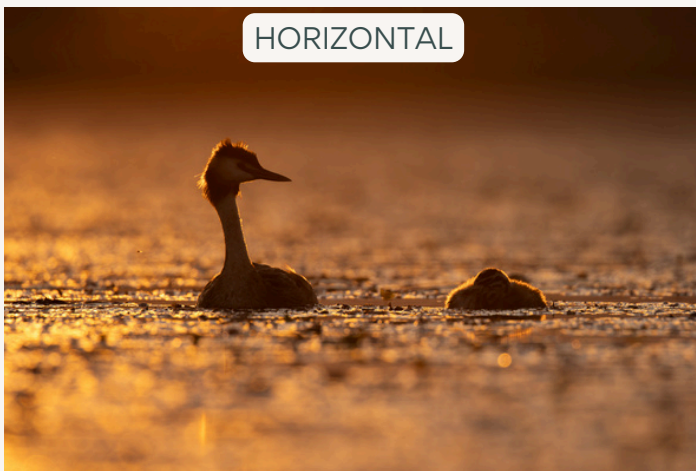
The goal is to support you in your journey from intuitive to intentional photography, broadening your perspective on wildlife photography’s endless possibilities, helping you to understand what you like the most and enriching your portfolio.



Image frame

- What's the aspect ratio of your camera?
- Does your camera offer the possibility to change it?

Orientation

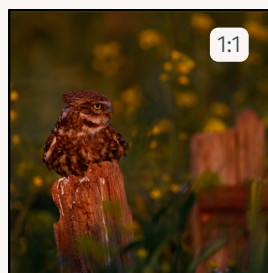
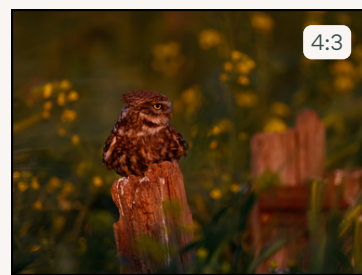
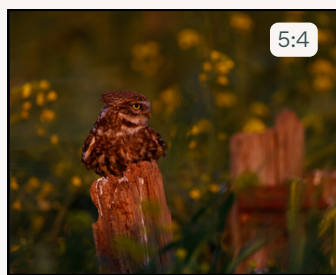
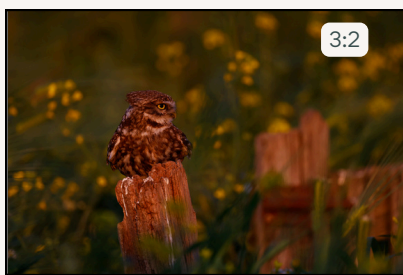


- Have you ever taken a photo **VERTICALLY**? What guided your choice? Vertical orientation can really suit subjects with a clear elongated shape.
- Take a photo of the same subject **horizontally** and then **vertically**. Think about the shape of the subject and the presence of vertical elements. Compare the photos and the resulting composition.

Cropping

Try alternative cropping strategy for old photos.
Find photos where you can...

- Crop to test other **aspect ratios**: what did you decide to exclude? Does this new crop feel differently?



Remember you can also go from horizontal to vertical by cropping!

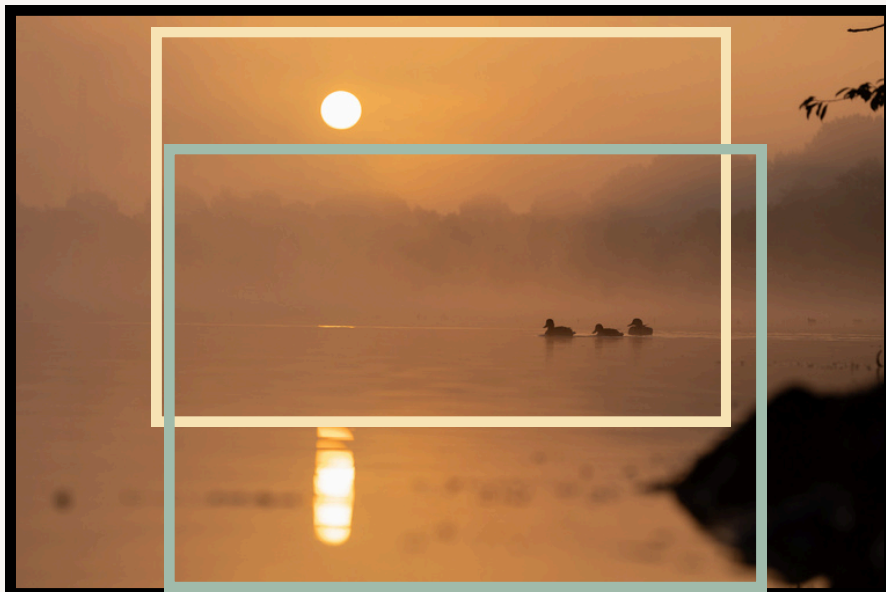


Cropping

- Crop to exclude a **distracting element**: is there anything along the edges (and especially at the corners) you could crop? Remember the concept of visual weight - anything along the edges is heavier!

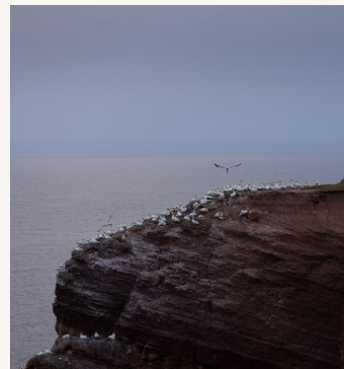


- Crop to **change composition**: your original composition works but is there anything you could exclude? Evaluate the benefit or removing vs. keeping some elements



Cropping

- Crop to **change story**: is there a photo you maybe cropped too much removing something which could be part of a story? Is there a photo that could tell multiple stories based on the crop? Pro tip: think about number of subjects or presence of external elements (ie. humans)



- Crop **less**: find a photo you maybe cropped too much in the past and re-evaluate the “croppability”

Factors that affect how much you can crop:

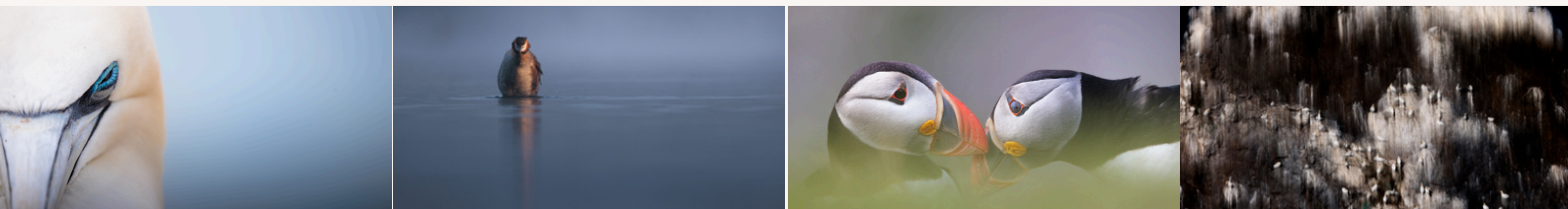
- Camera sensor
- Sharpness / Motion blur
- Focus accuracy
- Noise
- Post-production
- Photo destination



Identify subjects

Find an old photo or take a new one that has...

- Part of one subject (close-up, details)
- One subject
- Two subjects: not interacting or interacting with each other (how does the dynamic change?)
- Three (or more) subjects (remember the rule of odds)
- Group of animals



Part of One

One

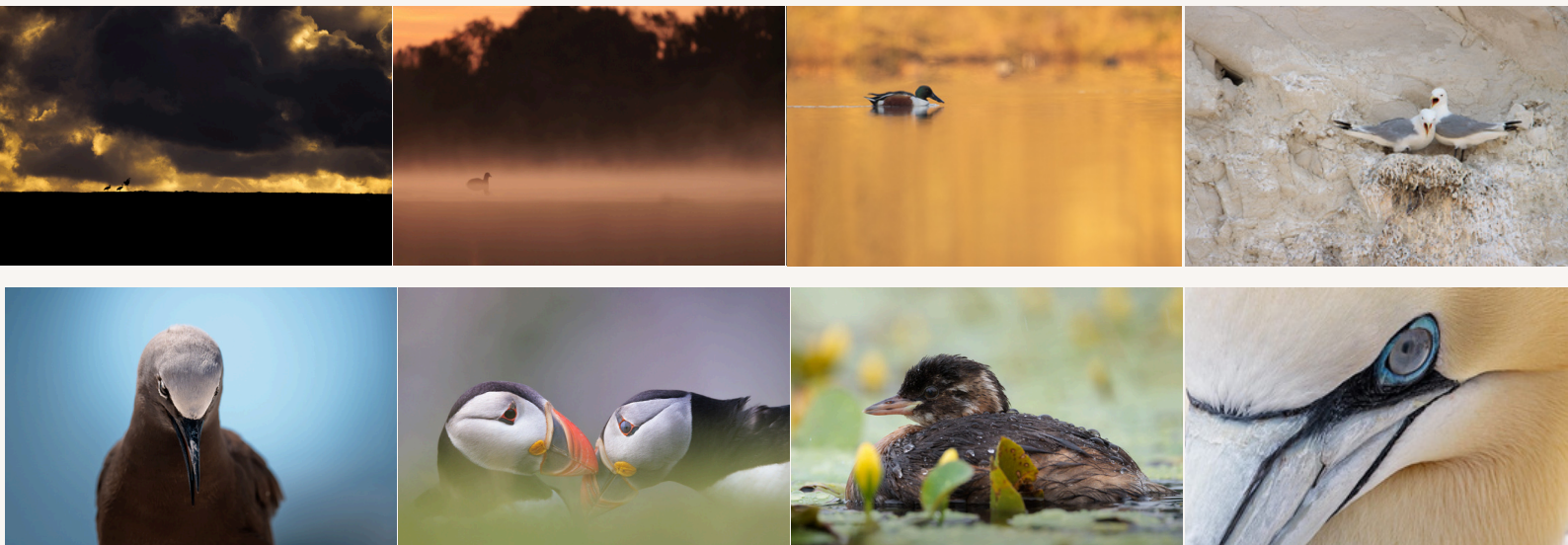
More than one

Large group

Subject vs. Space

Reflect on your current portfolio.

- How much space on average does the subject occupies?
- Go back at your archive and find different photos where the subject occupies only a % of the frame:
 - **1%**
 - **10%**
 - **25%**
 - **50%**
 - **75%**
 - **90%**
 - **100%**



- Go out and take photos of the same subject with it filling a different % of the frame (try to go from the extreme small in frame to the full close-up)

Now look at this photo collection together.

How does it feel? Nice to have so much diversity! Which one do you like the most?

Negative space

Find old photos or take a new ones where there is significant negative space in the form of:

- Sky
- Water body
- Anything in the foreground or background really distant and/or blurred (so with no details)



**vegetation in
the foreground**



**vegetation in
the background**



**water + distant
background
(fog)**

How do these photos look like? Take note of the mood/emotions these photos evoke.

Background and foreground

Go back to your archive and find at least 2 photos where:

- There's only background
- There's both background and foreground. Remember the foreground can help in enhancing the sense of depth! Reflect on how each layer contributes to the depth and story of the image.

BACKGROUND ONLY

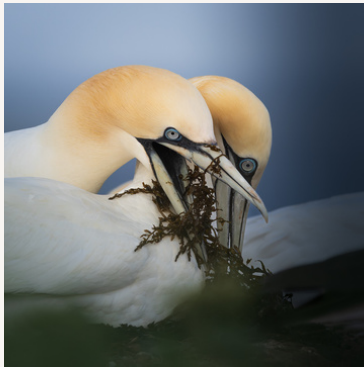


BACKGROUND



Background and foreground

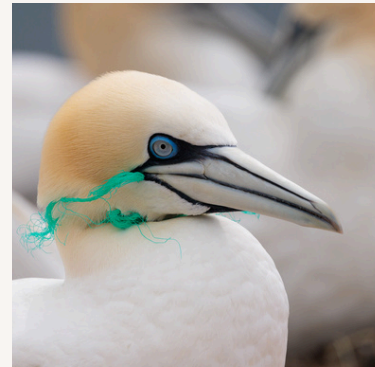
- Visit a location and take at least 3 wildlife photos with different backgrounds. Think about everything you could use (sky, water, vegetation of different types/colours, trees, flowers, rocks, other animals, human materials)



sky



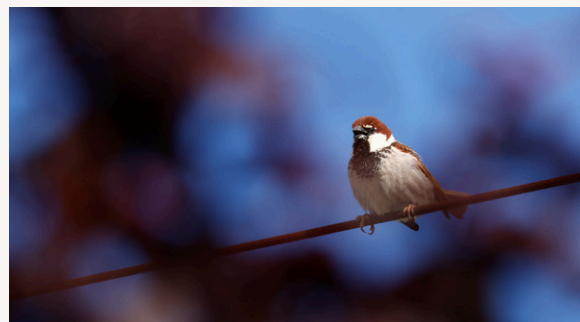
cliff



other birds

Remember sometimes changing angle or waiting for the subject to move or for the lighting conditions to change can reveal new backgrounds!

- In the same location and with the same subject, take a photo without and then with a foreground



Contrast

Contrast is one basic principle of composition and it is everywhere! We just have to train to look for it (and use it for our photos!).

- Go back to your photos and create pairs of photos that contrast with each other
- Go back to your photos and find images that have a type of contrast in them



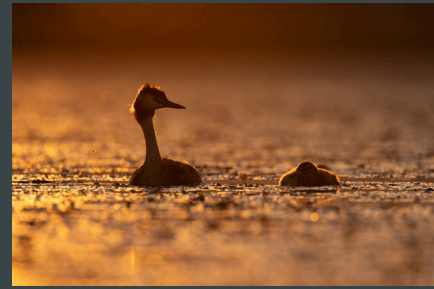
The first thing to look at? If the subject stands out it is because some kind of contrast!
For example here the subject is darker vs. a brighter and more colored background

- Choose a type of contrast and take intentionally a photo to represent it

In the next page you find a list of possible contrasts (both visual and conceptual) should you need some inspiration and some examples!

Contrast list

- large-small
- adult-baby
- long-short
- broad-narrow
- thick-thin
- bright-dark
- black-white
- much-little
- straight-curved
- horizontal-vertical
- high-low
- smooth-rough
- hard-soft
- still-moving
- light-heavy
- transparent-opaque
- liquid-solid
- strong-weak
- wildlife-human
- colorful-Black/White
- cold-warm
- life-death



Adult - chick



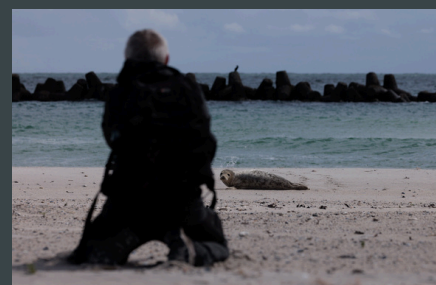
Dark - bright



One - Many



Life - Death



Human - Wildlife

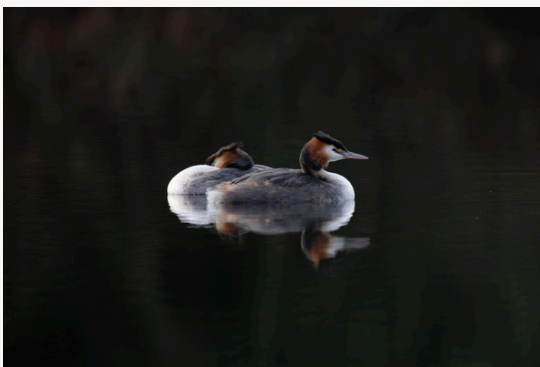
Balance

Balance is about creating harmony in your image so it results more aesthetically pleasing. Balance can be Static or Dynamic.



Go back to your photos and find:

- At least 2 photos with static balance (everything falls equally away from the middle)
- At least 2 with dynamic balance (unequal subjects or areas positioned not equally away from the middle)



- Notice how these compositions look different. Which type of balance you tend to prefer for your compositions?

Composition elements

Analyse **at least 5** of your best photos until now and look for the graphic elements that compose them:

- Points (single or multiple)
- Lines
 1. horizontal
 2. vertical
 3. diagonal
 4. curve
 5. eye-lines
 6. leading lines
- Shapes (triangle, circle, rectangle)
- Vectors

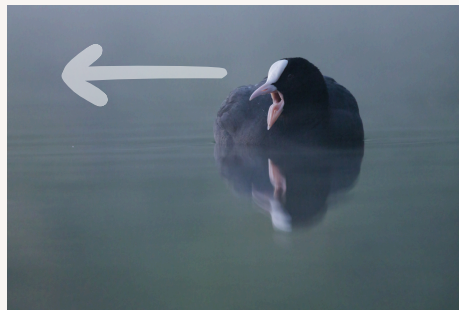
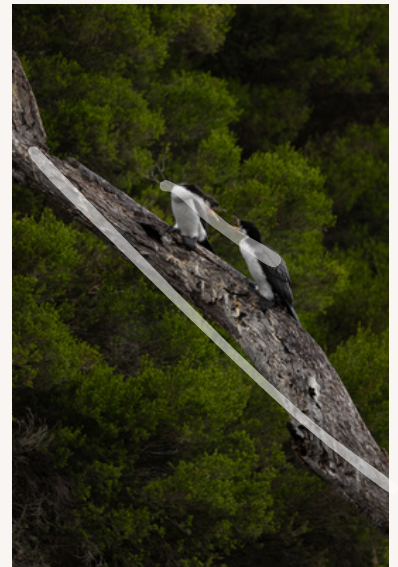
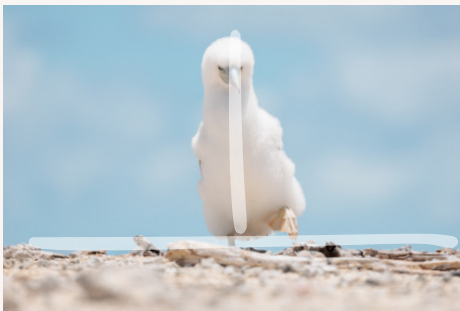
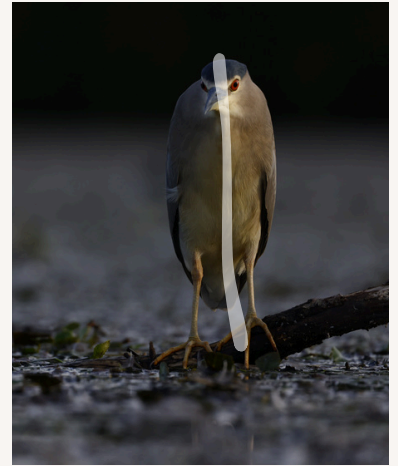
Look at the photographic elements

- Is the subject clear?
- Where's the focus?
- What's the depth?
- How's the light?
- What are the colors?

It can help to blur the images!



Composition elements - lines



Composition elements - Vectors and shapes

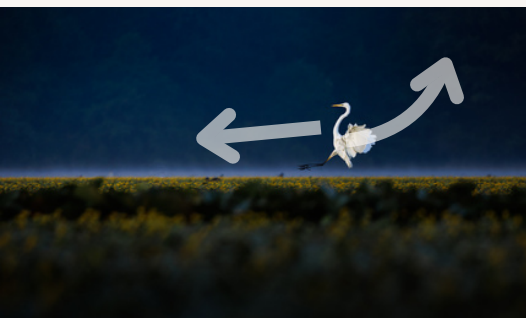
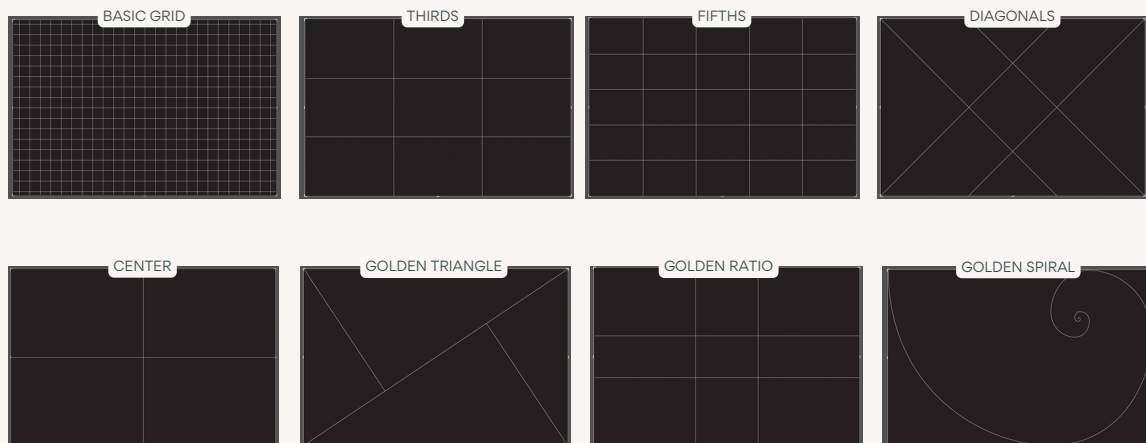


Image frame division

How do you normally decide the placement of the subject and of the other elements of your image? Find old photos or take a new ones to try placing the elements using different grids:

- Central
- Rule of thirds
- Diagonals
- Triangle
- Golden ratio and spiral

Here's all the gridlines available on Lightroom (shortcut O to change them!)



Remember - it can be helpful to know them, but don't obsess over alignment with the gridlines!

Image frame division

- Find at least 4 old photos or take new ones to experiment with the frame within frame technique, using different elements/objects (grass, leaves, flowers, branches, other wildlife, human objects).



Focus

- From the same spot, take at least 2 photos focusing on different subjects/elements.

Try to be creative!



Motion blur

- Find old photos or take a new ones to experiment with motion blur. Use relatively slow shutter speeds and/or move your camera to convey the sense of motion.



Moment

Wildlife photography is about capturing moments in wild animals' lives.

- Reflect on your portfolio: which is the most interesting moment you have ever captured with your camera? What made it so interesting?
- Find old photos or take new ones that capture a very exact “moment”. Here’s a list of only some of the interesting behaviours you might want to document:
 - In movement (walking, running, flying)
 - Foraging/Hunting
 - Grooming
 - Mating / Courtship Rituals
 - Parental Care
 - Territorial Behavior
 - Social Interactions
 - Predation
 - Sunning/Basking
 - Vocalization
 - Displaying Aggression
 - Playing
 - Building Structures

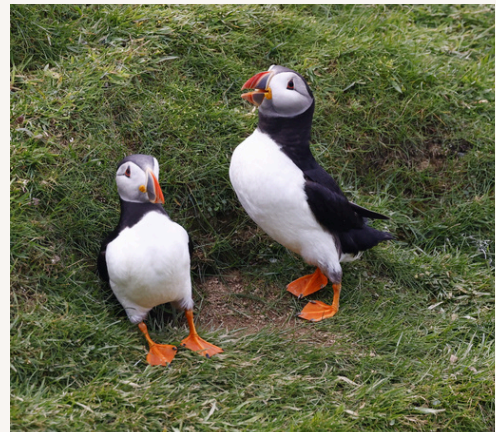
Symmetry and Reflections

- Find old photos or take a new ones to experiment the power of symmetry or reflections. How these elements affect composition harmony?



Perspective

- Photograph a subject from 3 different angles (low, eye-level, and high). Reflect on how changing the angle affects the composition and viewer's perspective.



Optics

- Have you ever used a wide angle lens for wildlife photography? Time to try! Even if it is just the kit lens of your very first camera.

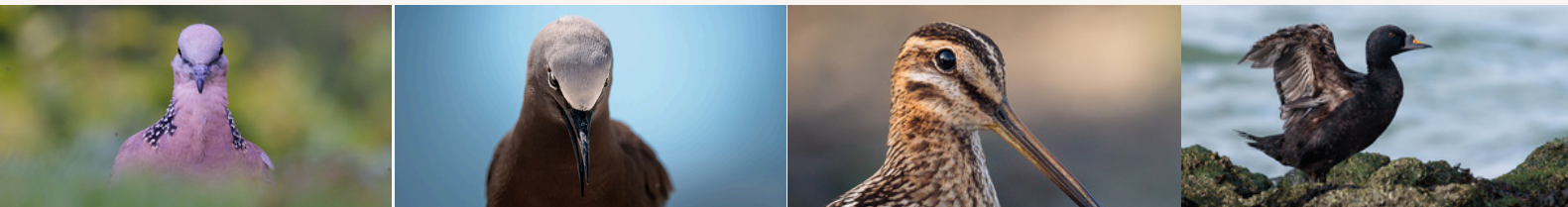
A wide-angle lens would normally produce an increased sense of depth and more diagonals (and therefore more dynamism). In addition, the viewpoint is more subjective and the photo will feel more immersive!



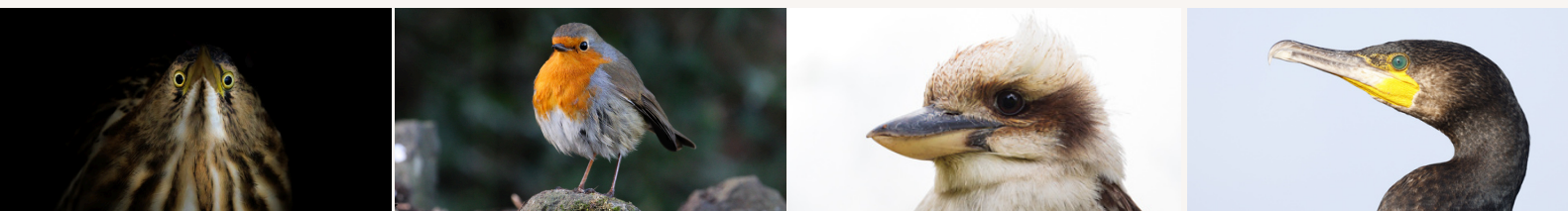
Eye power

One of the most powerful element you can use in your wildlife photos is the eye(s) of your subject.

- Think about your best photos: where was the subject looking?
- Take photos of the subject with its head rotated at different angles. Which one is the most engaging? Which one is your favourite? Does the catchlight become visible at specific angles?



Appreciation of morphological features



Engagement

Light

Find old photos or take a new ones to create your “light collection”:


LIGHT TYPE:

- Sunrise (golden hour)
- Sunset (golden hour)
- Blue hour
- Overcast
- Rainy/Stormy
- Foggy
- Harsh

LIGHT DIRECTION:

- Backlight/Silhouette
- Rim light
- Side light
- Frontal light

There are obviously many combinations of light type + light direction. The goal is to start “registering” which combinations give you the best results.



Light

Sunrise, backlight



Sunset, side



Blue hour



Overcast



Rainy



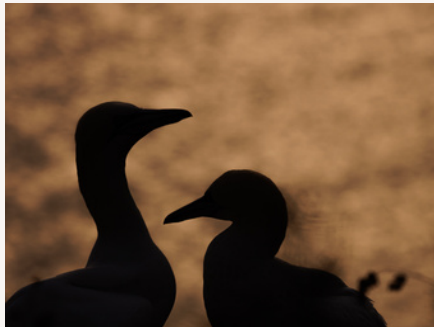
Fog



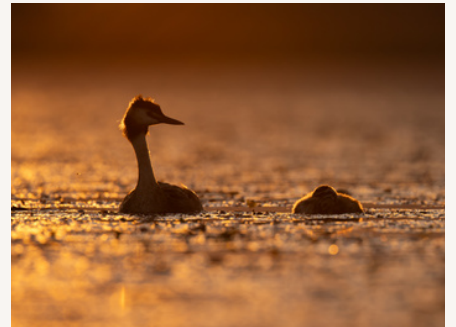
Harsh, side



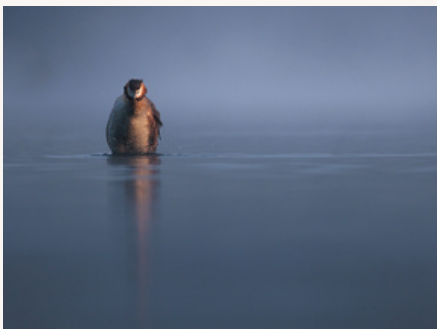
Sunset, back



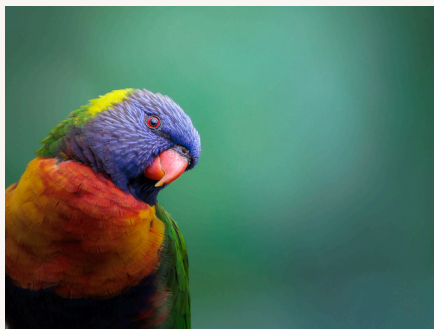
Sunset, rimlight



Sunrise, side



Harsh, frontal



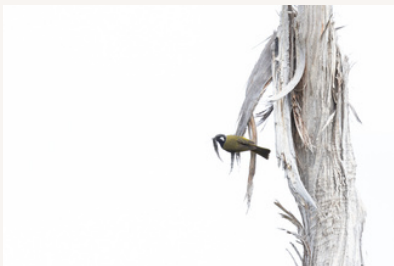
Tonal contrast

Find old photos or take a new ones to create a “tonal collection”.

Each image is characterised by a combination of 2 parameters: overall brightness (from bright to dark) and contrast (low to high). There are many possible combinations with these being some of them:

- High key
- Low key
- High contrast
- Average contrast
- Low contrast

**High key,
average contrast**



**Low key,
low contrast**



Dark, Low contrast




Dark, High contrast



Bright, Average contrast

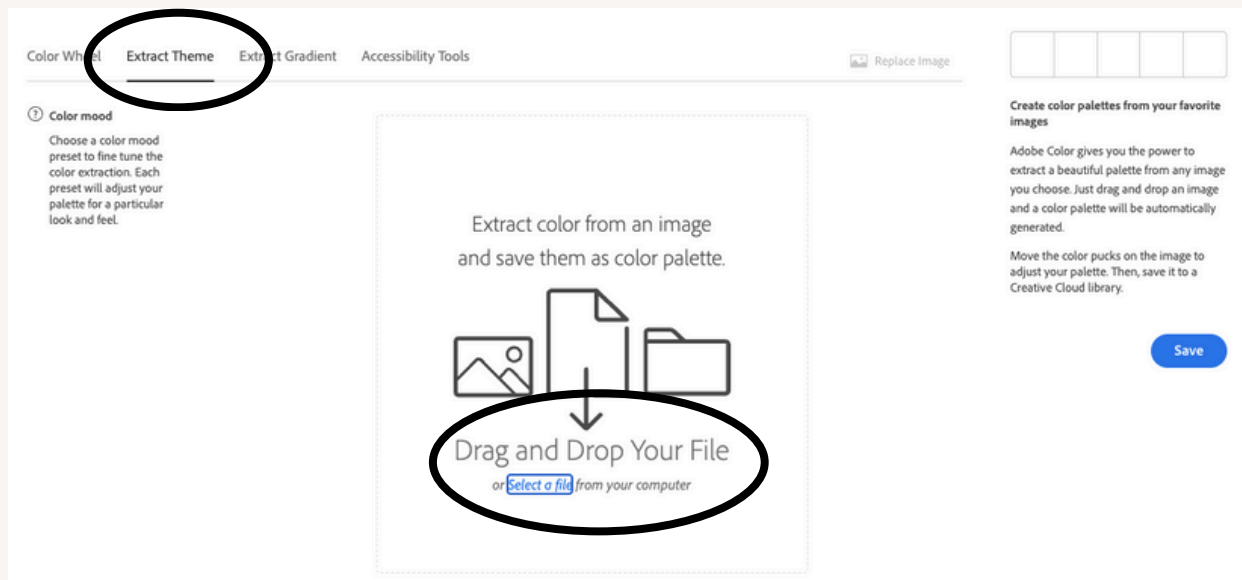
Colors

Analyse at least 5 of your best photos until now and analyse the colors:

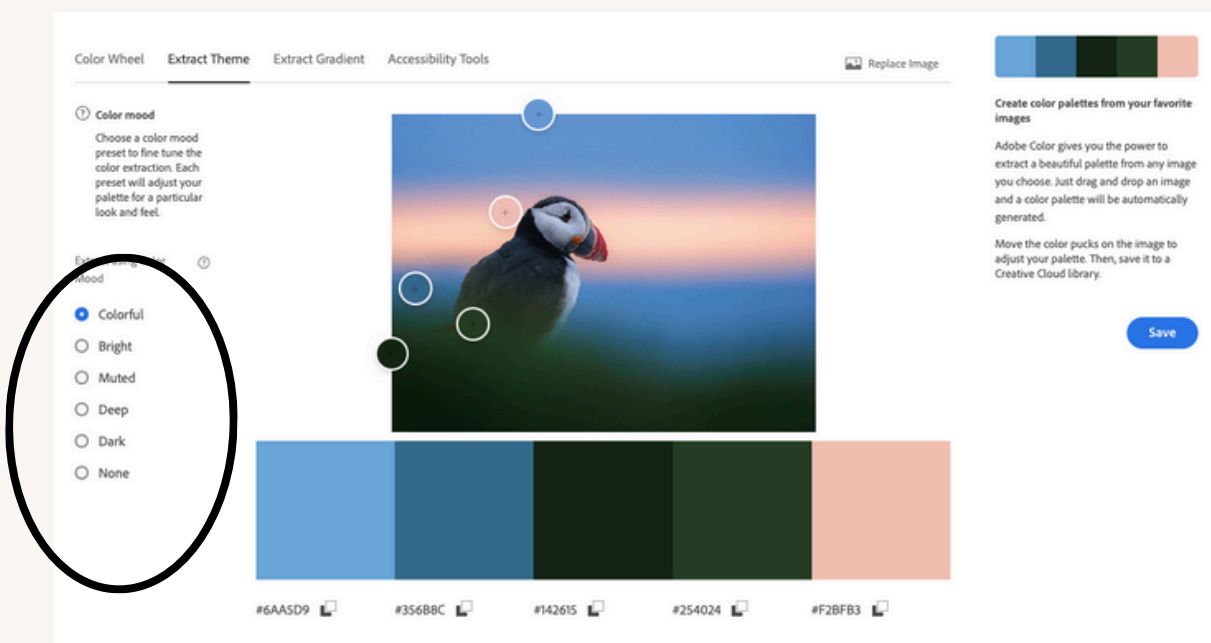
- Which are the main colors present?
 - What are these colors characteristics? Are they saturated or muted? Are they bright or dark?
 - Which feelings do these photos evoke? Is that associated with any specific color?
 - Can you recognise a pleasing colour palette?
- 

How to extract a color palette from a photo

- Head to Color Adobe and select your file

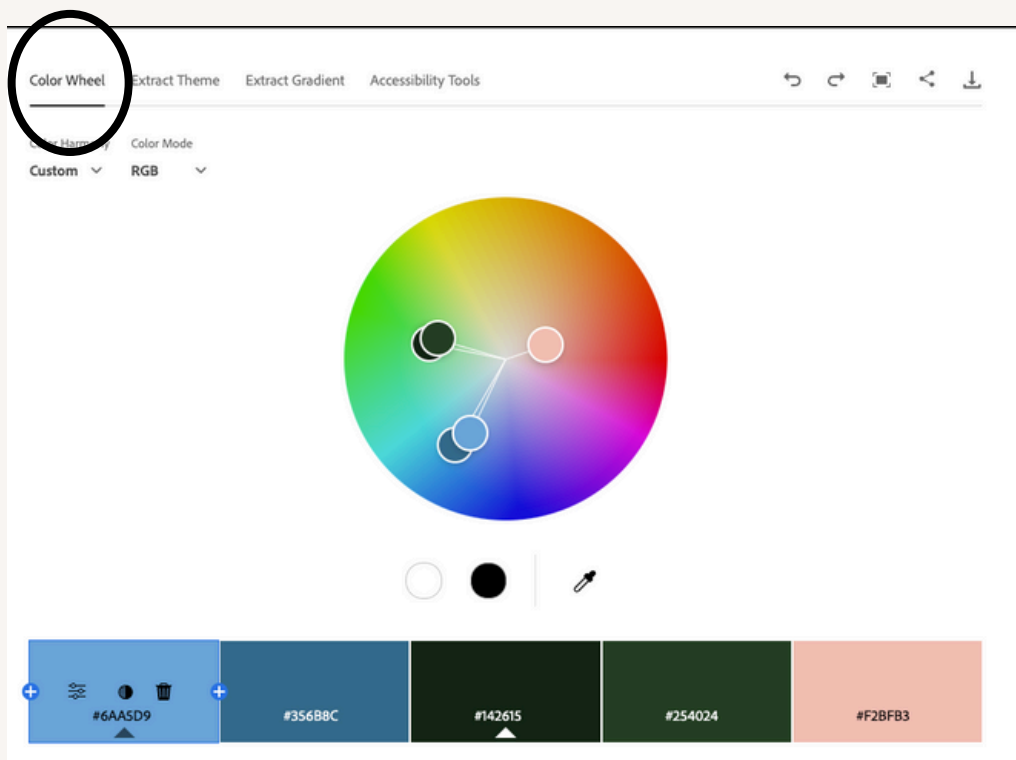


- The color palette will appear. You can also set a different “mood” to slightly change the colors selected

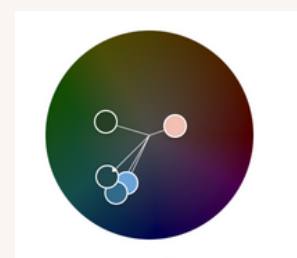


How to extract a color palette from a photo

- Click on the Color Wheel tab to visualise the colors you previously identified from your photo on the color Wheel. Analysing their “placement” on the Colour Wheel you can understand if they follow any specific color combination.



NOTE: by clicking on the individual color, you will visualise the color wheel with the BRIGHTNESS level of that specific color. For example here the color wheel brightness is based on the first color, but you see the greens are much darker.

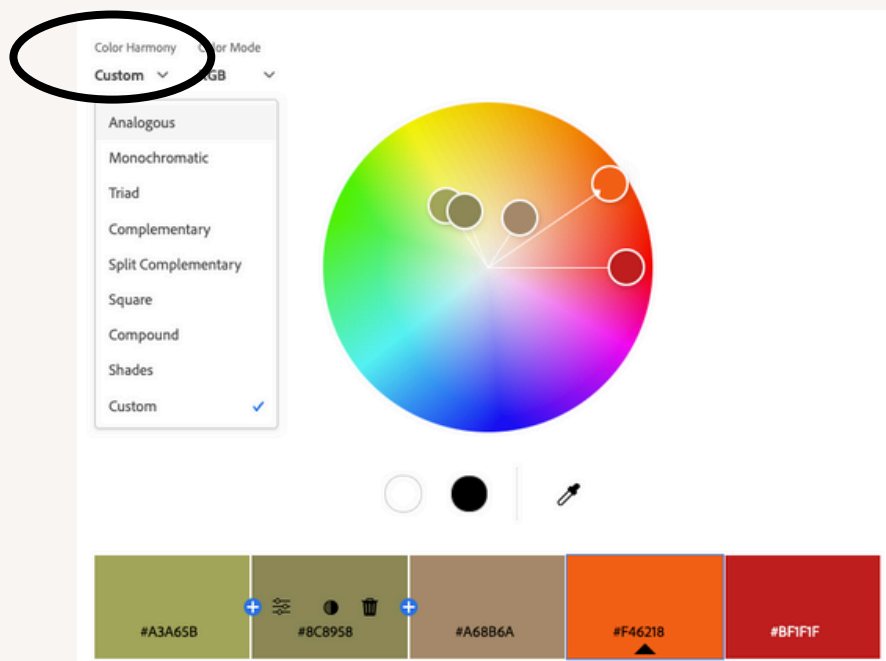


How to know which color will suit better your photo?

- Extract your color palette as before and go to the Color Wheel Tab.
- Out of the 5 colors, select your main one by hovering on it and clicking on the small arrow at the bottom as the **Base Colour** (for example the more represented color of the subject). In this case I selected the orange as the key one of an Oystercatcher. You can also remove the other colors if you want to work with color palettes consisting of less colors.

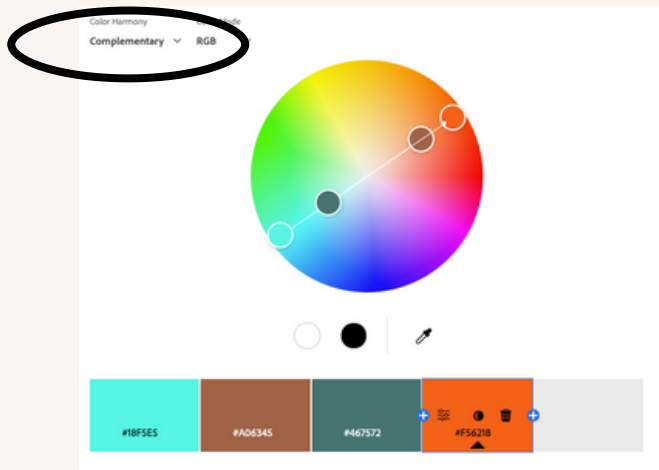


- Then on Color Harmony change the different types to discover the color combination options.



How to know which color will suit better my photo?

For example, here I discovered the colors which will result in a Complimentary combination.




How to use this information?

- You can decide to edit your photo to try to re-create this color combination using an editing software
- You can use this information to plan your next photo

Colors

- If you're open to edit colors more creatively in your wildlife photos, re-edit at least 3 old photos specifically working with colors based on the more ideal color combination you found.

For example on Lightroom you could use any of these parameters/features to achieve the color you want:

- Temperature
 - Tint
 - Vibrance/Saturation
 - Color Mixer
 - Point Color
 - Color Range Mask
-
- How does the new edit feels like? Is the resulting combination more pleasing than the old edit?
- 

Colors


Find old photos or take new ones to create your “color collection”:

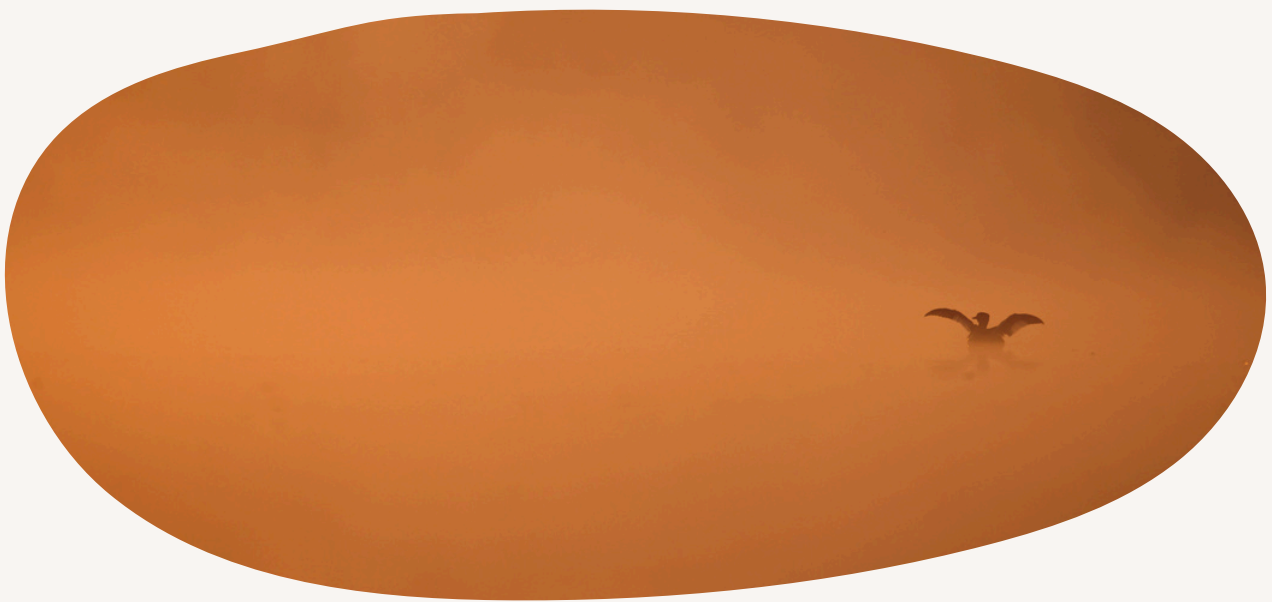
- Warm colors only
- Cold colors only
- Warm + cold
- Monochromatic
- Analogous
- Complementary
- Triadic or Tetradic
- Low saturation
- High saturation



Need help? Play with color combinations at Adobe Color or [Color wheel Canva](#)

Final reflections


- **Favorite Composition:** Choose your favorite photo identified or taken during these exercises. Reflect on why you consider it the best and how the compositional techniques discussed contributed to its success.
 - **Storytelling:** Create a photo series (3-5 images) that tells a story. Reflect on how composition helps convey the narrative and connect the images.
 - **Personal Style:** Review your work from these exercises and identify any recurring compositional techniques or preferences. Reflect on how these might define your personal style as a wildlife photographer.
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**If you have any questions, don't hesitate to
contact me!**

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 [@chiaratalia_birds](https://www.instagram.com/chiaratalia_birds)

 [@chiaratalia_wild](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...)