

It's that time of year when the bird migration is happening in the Las Vegas Valley. The migration starts in mid-to late March and last until early June. It is surprising how many species of birds come through our area. Wildlife is also more active in the cooler weather before the dog days of summer.

My recommendations for shooting both birds and wildlife, These are things that most videos won't tell you. Be aware that your milage will vary:

1. Never shoot at speeds less than your focal length. Ex at 200 mm shoot at least 1/200th of a second, at 500 mm shoot at least 1/500th of a second.
2. The closer the subject or subjects the faster you need to shoot.
3. The closer the subject the blurrier the background, the further away the sharper the background. It is Okay to have part of the subject blurry if the eyes are sharp, however some judges like the face sharp.
4. Subjects with a lot of white or black can be extremely difficult to shoot and you must get the ISO correct. Use spot metering and meter on the white or black areas of the subject. It's OK to have light/high key background which draws attention to the subject, same is true with a dark background.
5. If your camera is capable of animal eye tracking use it. However, keep in mind it is not always the best. Eye tracking can get confused especially when there is not a lot of contrast between the subject and the background. Or a lot of high contrast in the background. I use spot AF with the latter.
6. With a mirrorless camera don't worry shooting images up to ISO 12800 or even higher, if your exposure is within a stop of your mid-point, noise won't be too bad. Make sure that your whites are not blown out and your black too dark.
7. Look for backgrounds that are not distracting, sometime moving a few inches one way or another can make a big difference.
8. If time permits, try different angles. Typically, low angles that are even with the subject are often the most appealing, but not always.
9. Be careful post processing when using denoise and sharpen. Don't always choose the default model, look through several to see which one does the best for you. If you use an application to denoise or sharpen outside of your processing software, don't use denoise or sharpen included in your processing application, it can create some weird artifacts.

The better you know how your camera works, the better photographer you will become. There are lots of videos online to help you. From step by step on how to setup your camera for wildlife, birds and even insects. Practice, practice, practice...

My recommendations for shooting birds, your milage may vary:

1. Shoot faster speeds than you think you need to. If they are sitting still start shooting them at 1/160th of a second (but see #3), moving birds require at least 1/1000th a second or more, flying birds 1/2500th or more, for hummingbirds 1/4000th to 1/8000th of a second will help capture sharp wings.
2. The smaller the bird the faster you need to shoot, larger birds like ducks don't require as fast a speed.
3. Never shoot at speeds less than your focal length even for perched or sitting birds. Ex at 200 mm shoot at least 1/200th of a second, at 500 mm shoot at least 1/500th of a second.
4. Shoot single birds at the lowest aperture setting your lens is capable of, unless you want the background to be in focus F.4 - F6.3.
 - a. Check which ISO your lens shoots sharpest at for each focal length. My 100-500 shoots best at F6 for 100-300mm and F8 for 300-500mm
5. When shooting groups of birds shoot faster speeds and an ISO of at least F10, most of the time I'll shoot the at F11.
 - a. Try to get separation between the subjects or at least their heads.
 - b. Try to get them with their eyes open.
6. Try to isolate single birds on a branch or shoreline with a pleasing or clear background to make the bird stand out.

Some of the local areas I recommend going for birds and wildlife are:

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| 1. Corn Creek at Desert National Wildlife Refuge | Birds and Wildlife |
| 2. Anywhere around Lake Mead | Birds and Wildlife |
| 3. Floyd Lamb Park | Birds |
| 4. Red Rock Canyon | Birds and Wildlife |
| 5. Veterans Park in Boulder | Birds |
| 6. Craig Ranch | Birds |
| 7. Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve | Birds |
| 8. Wetlands Park in Henderson | Birds and Wildlife |

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| 9. Spring Mountain State Park | Birds and Wildlife |
| 10. Pahrangat National Wildlife Refuge | Birds and Wildlife |
| 11. Valley of Fire State Park | Mainly Wildlife |
| 12. Any Springs or creeks | Birds and Wildlife |