



## Insider's Guide: How and Where to Photograph Birds in Southern Africa

Isak Pretorius

380 pages; softcover. R250.  
Jacana Media  
ISBN 978-1-4314-0930-3

The digital SLR era has revolutionised bird photography. With a little expertise and patience, anyone can take images that would have been award-winning a few decades ago. Not unexpectedly, this has seen enormous growth in the number of people attempting to photograph birds. It's thus perhaps surprising that it has taken so long for a book to be written providing practical advice on how to take good photographs of birds.

Isak Pretorius has the right pedigree for the job. His engineering background and extensive experience as a bird photographer and guide come together in this readable book that combines a wealth of practical advice with just enough explanation of the technical underpinnings of photography to enable the beginner to understand the important principles. The stunning images that liberally illustrate each point provide more than enough evidence of Isak's credibility, and are supported by clear, simple diagrams. Most of the birds are correctly identified,

# reviews YOU CAN use

which is not always the case with bird photographers!

The book starts with the expensive business of getting the right equipment. It caters to both Canon and Nikon users (no Sony, unfortunately), although it is clear that the author mainly uses Canon. It then describes how to ensure correct exposure and focus under often challenging conditions, and emphasises the importance of making the most of natural light. Flash photography is also covered, noting that it is often more useful as a supplement to natural light than for taking images at night.

Another chapter deals with the practicalities of getting close enough to birds in the right conditions to take memorable images. Interestingly there is barely any mention of the use of playback, which although controversial remains a key tool for many bird photographers.

One chapter is devoted to photographic composition – something often forgotten in the excitement of finding a sought-after subject. But the author is honest enough to admit that when it comes to action shots, such as birds in flight, much of the composition has to take place after the event, through judicious cropping.

The book stresses that good birding sites are not necessarily good for bird photography, and the penultimate chapter describes some of the author's favourite photographic destinations throughout southern Africa (and the Seychelles). This is perforce an eclectic selection, but I would have expected a nod to seabird photography, with its unique set of challenges.

The language is simple and direct, with only the occasional grammatical slip. There is a comprehensive glossary, but no index. There is some repetition, but this is probably deliberate, as the book is designed to be dipped into rather than read from cover to cover.



One of the book's strengths is the wealth of practical advice, much of which is neatly highlighted in summary sections at the start of each chapter and separate boxes of tips. The 'cheat cards' in the final section are an ideal way to pull together a great deal of technical information, providing practical advice for virtually any bird photography challenge.

I would like to have seen a chapter or two on post-processing, which remains something of a black-box for many birders making the transition to photography. That notwithstanding, this is the perfect book for the beginner bird photographer, and will prove valuable to enthusiasts wishing to up their game.

PETER RYAN

**WIN!** If you would like to be entered into the lucky draw to win one of three copies of *Insider's Guide: How and Where to Photograph Birds in Southern Africa* by award-winning photographer Isak Pretorius, courtesy of Jacana Media, e-mail your name, full physical address and a daytime telephone number to [editor@birdlife.org.za](mailto:editor@birdlife.org.za), with 'How to Photograph Birds' in the subject line. Entries for this giveaway close on 28 February 2015.