



## PHOTO MASTERCLASS PART ONE

# WILD PLACES

in association with  
**TAMRON®**



Welcome to the first of our exclusive 12-part series on the art of wildlife and nature photography. Each issue, we will focus on a different type of photography and demonstrate how you can improve your pictures. This month, we show you how to take better photographs of landscapes.

WITH WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER MARK CARWARDINE

**WHAT COULD BE EASIER** than walking or driving up to a beautiful mountain, forest, lake or rocky shore and taking a prize-winning picture? There's no need for specialist equipment – the subject is visually impressive in its own right and doesn't run away if you get too close. There's plenty of time to choose the right lens, set up the tripod (you weren't thinking of taking the picture without a tripod, were you?) compose the shot – and snap.

But if photographing landscapes is so easy, why is it that few images really do their subjects justice? Many photos show scenes that are undeniably breathtaking or inspiring, but the images themselves are not. The reason is simple – pleasing composition doesn't happen

automatically or by chance. Regardless of how impressive a landscape may be, simply pointing a camera at it doesn't guarantee a good photo.

So, how do you make an image of your local wood look more eye-catching than a holiday picture of the Grand Canyon? These are the questions we'll be answering this month. We'll explore the best ways to compose and construct a picture for maximum impact, find out how to ensure that every shot is pin-sharp, and learn the importance of light and how to become visually sensitive to its changing nuances. There is no formulaic way of taking a good picture of a wild place, of course, but there are a few tips and tricks that will improve your images overnight. ►

▲ John Shaw has been hailed as one of the best nature photographers around. His photo of snow-festooned trees in Crater Lake National Park, Oregon, USA, demonstrates his use of shapes, lines, colours and textures to create a striking image.



## MEET THE EXPERT...

Every issue, our world famous photographers share their knowledge and skills.

### JOHN SHAW USA

John Shaw has been a professional nature photographer since the early 1970s. He has won many awards and written seven books.



John Shaw doesn't like rules in photography. Who says you have to shoot certain subjects vertically and others horizontally, or that you must use a wide-angle lens to photograph landscapes?

He stresses the importance of light, pointing out that it's almost impossible to take a great picture in horrible light. "Most people take pictures of things – rocks, mountains, trees – but a good landscape photographer takes pictures of light," he explains. John points out that "anywhere in the world can be magical if you are there at the right time" and if you learn to take advantage of the different seasons and the best light at the beginning or end of the day. And he positively loves bad weather. "Bad weather is really good weather when you're a landscape photographer," he says,

**"Most people take pictures of things, but a good landscape photographer takes pictures of light."**

"because you're always looking for mood and drama." John thinks like an artist rather than a technician. "Just analyse the word 'photo-graphic' and you'll begin to understand the importance of design," he says. "Good photography

is all about good design – shapes, lines, colours and textures." The golden rule is simplicity and, with this in mind, it's important to peel away the visual clutter.

John wishes more people could use a 5x4 view camera, which shows the world upside down and backwards, because it takes away all familiarity. "What better way to force photographers to see beyond the subject and think in terms of those two key elements: light and design?"

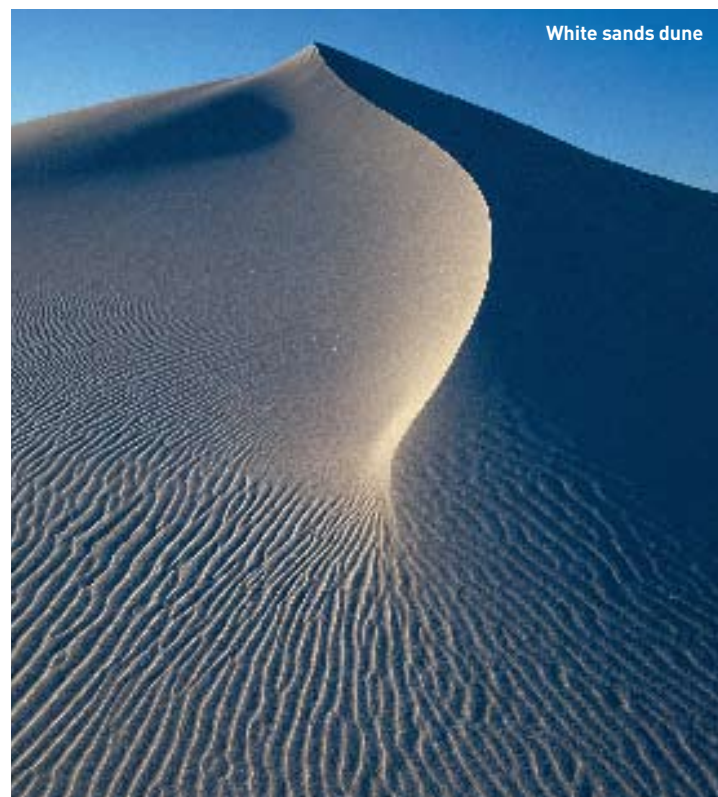
## John Shaw's top landscape photography tips



Balanced rock

### 1 Use the light

Light is the essence of landscape photography. Beautiful or dramatic light can transform an otherwise ordinary picture into an extraordinary one. The best light is at the beginning or end of the day, at the edge between daylight and darkness, when the sun is close to or even below the horizon.



White sands dune

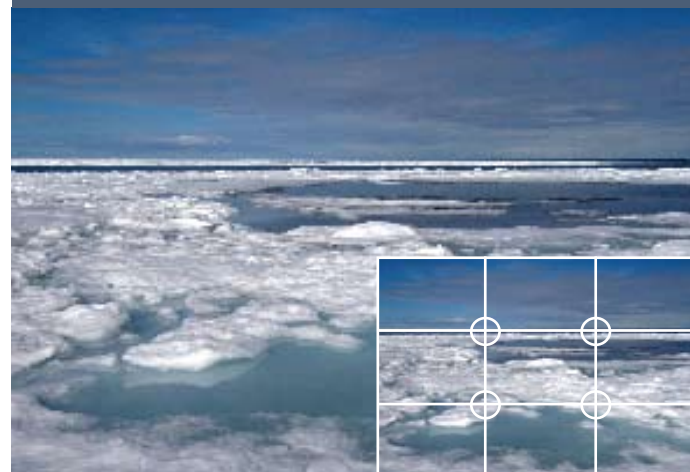
### 2 Design the picture

Light may be the essence of landscape photography, but careful design is the basic ingredient. Think graphically – beyond the actual subject. Try setting the lens slightly out of focus for a few moments before taking the picture to help you see the shapes, lines, colours and textures more prominently.

## YOUR STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE...

Mark Carwardine shows you how to apply the theory to get the perfect picture.

### 1 USE THE RULE OF THIRDS



- » **Rules are made to be broken** in photography, but this one works surprisingly often. It states that a well-balanced picture is divided into thirds (eg one-third sky and two-thirds land) rather than halves (with the horizon in the middle). The rule of thirds also helps create a sense of dynamic tension by identifying 'points of power'.
- » **Imagine drawing two horizontal and two vertical lines** across the frame to produce four points where the lines cross (*inset*). Then try positioning a rock or a tree on one of those points instead of dead centre. It makes the picture far more compelling.

### 2 TRY A TELEPHOTO LENS



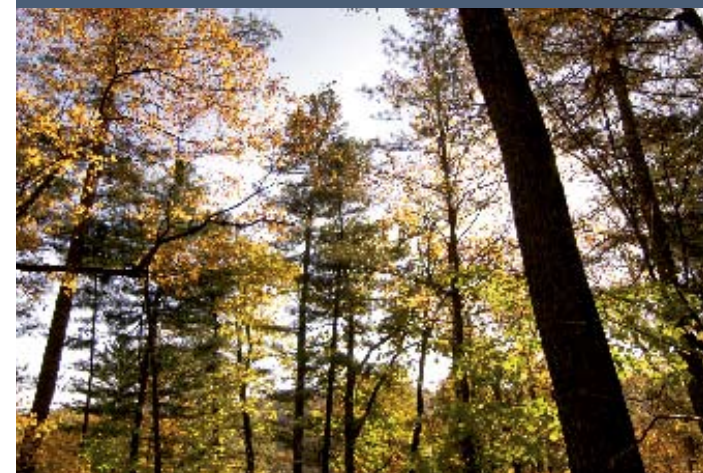
- » **There is no single correct lens** for landscape photography, but trying using a telephoto instead of a wide-angle to get a different effect. A telephoto lens compresses the scene while also bringing it closer – so it's not the same as moving nearer to a particular part of the picture.
- » **The isolation effect** of a telephoto, which makes it much easier to remove all the clutter and focus on just one element, helps to pare down picture-taking to the bare essentials of composition.

### 3 ADD SOME FOREGROUND INTEREST



- » **Try using a rock, flower, tree or even water ripples** to add some foreground interest to your landscape pictures. Get down low (if your hands and knees aren't muddy you're not low enough) to give it a really dramatic perspective.
- » **Using a wide-angle lens** very close to a natural subject in the foreground, with the rest of the scene disappearing into the distance, adds drama and depth. It decompresses the view and makes a two-dimensional image much more three-dimensional. Keep the foreground subject in sharp focus or it won't work.

### 4 DEFINE YOUR SUBJECT



- » **A professional landscape photographer** is able to define the precise subject and purpose of any picture. Vague feelings are not enough. Try saying out loud what you're planning to photograph (see through the jumble of features in a landscape and think in terms of lines, shapes, colours, textures and patterns), then include what fits your definition and nothing else.
- » **The simpler your brief**, the better the picture will be. Before you release the shutter, do a final viewfinder check for unwanted branches, rocks or even jet trails disrupting the composition.



## ESSENTIAL KIT... TRIPOD



A landscape photographer without a tripod is like a boat without a keel. It's one of the most important accessories you'll ever own and will sharpen your pictures immediately.

### WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- » **Weight** – heavier usually means sturdier (though most professionals use carbon-fibre models that are sturdy but relatively lightweight).
- » **Heavy-duty head** – a good quality tripod head provides easy, smooth movements in all directions.
- » **Legs** – these must be easy to extend and adjust, and should offer a comfortable maximum working height.

### CHEAPER ALTERNATIVES:

- » **Monopod** – a one-legged tripod (if that makes sense) that isn't as steady as its three-legged friend, but better than nothing at all.
- » **Brick-sized bean bag** – fill it up with beans, rice or even birdfood and use it to rest your camera on fence posts, rocks, bird hides and car windows.

## DOS & DON'TS

- » **DO** take time to think about the picture you are taking. Don't just hope for the best.
- » **DO** try to get one outstanding picture rather than several mediocre ones.
- » **DO** keep it simple.
- » **DON'T** fill the picture with too much clutter – less is more.
- » **DON'T** take pictures in the harsh, contrasting light of the midday sun.
- » **DON'T** stay indoors because it's raining.

## In association with TAMRON



Tamron AF 28-300mm F3.5-6.3 XR Di LD Aspherical (IF) Macro Can be used with both digital SLR and 35mm AF-SLR film cameras. At 83.7mm, it's particularly suited to travel photography.

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# MASTERCLASS UK CHALLENGE...



Spring is a great time to photograph our wild places. Landscape photographer **David Noton** explains how to shoot our finest habitats and sets you a challenge.



## Woodlands

Woodlands are a challenge because of the difficult lighting conditions. Sunlight filtering through the trees looks great, but causes contrast problems in photos. Experiment with the flat, low contrast lighting of a grey day, or use the backlit golden mist hanging among the trees at dawn. Get down low to show case bluebells.



## Farmland

Round our way, hedges verging country lanes explode with new spring growth. Use them as a compositional tool leading you into a shot. A high viewpoint can be an advantage. As with all landscapes, location finding is the key. Once you've found a good spot, go back to make the most of it in different lighting conditions.



## Coastline

Spring clifftops are ablaze with wildflowers. Try using this splash of colour to add foreground interest. Plan your shot taking into account the direction of the light at different times of day. Experiment with the soft light of dawn and dusk and warm hues of sunrise and sunset. Be bold in your composition.



## Mountains

In spring, there's still the chance of snow on mountain peaks. Pick a top that you've shot with foreground interest, such as plants or rocks, to balance the image. Reflections on still lochs are a winner. Sweep your eye from corner to corner of the frame to make sure there is nothing there that doesn't add to the image.

## READER PHOTO OF THE MONTH

Now it's your turn. Using our experts' hints and tips in this month's masterclass, why not try to take the type of picture recommended above by David Noton? Send it to us and it could be published in *BBC Wildlife*. You don't have to try and replicate David's images exactly, just use your new skills to take a picture of a wood, coastline, farmland or mountain.

### HOW TO ENTER

Simply log on to [www.bbcwildlifemagazine.com](http://www.bbcwildlifemagazine.com) and click on Photo Masterclass, then follow the instructions to upload your images. Closing date: Friday 17 March.

### RULES

1) The competition is open only to amateur photographers. 2) Up to two entries only per category. 3) Entry of a picture constitutes a grant to BBC Worldwide to publish it. 4) Entries will be judged by *BBC Wildlife* and Mark Carwardine. 5) The winning image will be published in the May issue. 6) No correspondence will be entered into and winners will not be notified. 7) Entries will not be accepted by post or e-mail.

## COMING UP...

- » **April: Mammal Portraits** with Frans Lanting
- » **May: In Praise of Plants** with Peter Lilja
- » **June: From Dusk to Dawn** with Richard du Toit
- » **July: Underwater Photography** with David Doubilet
- » **August: Other Animal Portraits** with Josef Szentpéteri
- » **September: Birds in Flight** with Vincent Munier
- » **Autumn: Animals in their Environment** with Tom Mangelsen
- » **October: Bird Portraits** with Tui de Roy
- » **November: Composition & Form** with Art Wolfe
- » **December: Bad Weather** with Jim Brandenburg
- » **January: Innovative Photography** with Joe McDonald