



PHOTO MASTERCLASS PART 13

in association with
TAMRON®

COLD WEATHER WILDLIFE



Frost, ice and snow not only change the appearance of the world around us, but also the way animals behave. This offers great possibilities for taking unusual, beautifully lit photographs. One of the biggest challenges is staying warm!

WITH WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER MARK CARWARDINE

MANY OF THE BEST wildlife photographs are taken when the going gets really tough. Whether it's dark and moody or crisp and sunny, winter photographic opportunities are limitless. Snow-covered fields, frosted plants, mist hanging gently over a calm lake, icicles suspended from a branch and leaves trapped in an icy pond are just some of the fantastic possibilities. Then there are the animals themselves. The trick is to look for details that really say 'cold' – a bird hunkered down in its feathers, a fox with its frosty breath hanging in the air or the ice on a walrus's moustache.

Winter light is cause for celebration, too. It can be gorgeous – even in the middle of the day. The sun stays relatively low in the sky from dawn until dusk,

providing extended opportunities for low contrast, side-lit shooting. And, of course, there's the added bonus that shorter days offer more congenial working hours (unless of course you're like this month's expert photographer, Staffan Widstrand, who shoots through the night).

There is no reason why your camera should not stand up to the cold and function in extreme conditions. The one piece of equipment that doesn't like freezing temperatures is the battery, but we'll be explaining how to slow down the power drain that is the bane of cold weather photographers. And we'll be sorting out the inevitable exposure problems caused by bright snow and ice.

So this month, we'll be wrapping up, braving the elements and taking some of the best pictures of the year.

▲ An Arctic fox in thick white winter pelage forages on densely packed snow. In this image, Staffan Widstrand uses the low sunlight to pick out the animal so that it glows, and also to illuminate every ripple and ridge in the snow. Note the variety of shadow depth and colour – every shade of blue, purple, mauve and lilac is represented.

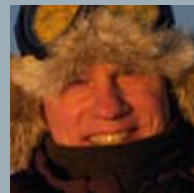


MEET THE EXPERT...

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

STAFFAN WIDSTRAND SWEDEN

Staffan Widstrand is an Arctic specialist, known for mixing photo-journalism with an artistic approach. He has won many awards and uses his pictures to actively promote conservation.



Stockholm-based photographer Staffan Widstrand loves the cold. "Chilly temperatures mean more beautiful colours, clearer air and special light," he enthuses. "Temperature is so fundamental to Arctic photography that I can look at a picture and tell how cold it was when it was taken."

"The main challenge is keeping warm," he says. "If you get too cold, you develop a negative attitude and quickly lose your creativity." Another challenge is finding the wildlife. "Arctic animals are wonderful to photograph," he says, "but they are few and far between. I spend as much time searching for subjects as I do photographing them."

Staffan likes to set himself long-term goals. He has just spent four years on his Wild Sweden project, which includes pictures of wildlife, wilderness and people. He is an ardent conservationist and the project, which involves everything from kayaking to reindeer trekking, emphasises the enjoyment of nature. "I don't just shoot commercial images," he says. "I shoot because I get fired up about the natural world and want to show people what we are doing to it."

Staffan describes himself as a 'picture-aholic'. "I can't resist studying pictures of all kinds," he says, "and I am always sketching ideas. I love wishing for things to happen, because sometimes wishes come true."

Top of his wishlist is the snowy owl. "Despite all my years in the Arctic, I've only seen it once – and that was from miles away," he laughs. "But I don't give up easily."

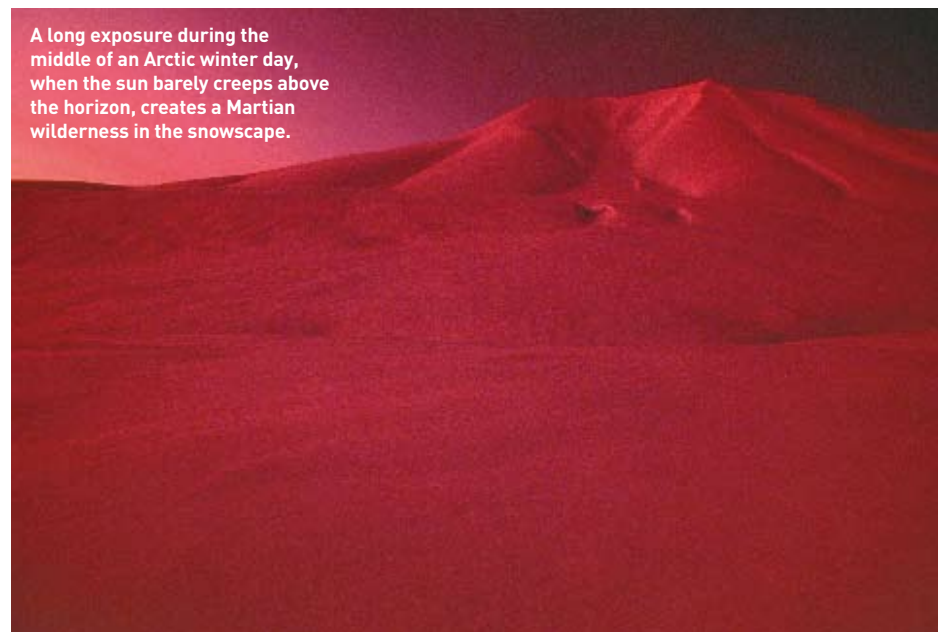
Staffan Widstrand's cold weather photography tips



Turn the lack of light on a dull winter's day to your advantage by experimenting with slow shutter speeds to create images such as this abstract moose.

1 Keep your batteries warm

Modern cameras work amazingly well in sub-zero temperatures, but their batteries are highly susceptible to cold. Lithium batteries are best, but even they should always be well protected from the elements, hidden away in a pocket or bag. Just remember not to put them right next to your body or they will collect condensation.



A long exposure during the middle of an Arctic winter day, when the sun barely creeps above the horizon, creates a Martian wilderness in the snowscape.

2 Make the most of the light

The mistake many photographers make is to get up too late and go to bed too early. You should be out taking pictures long before first light and then long after the sun has disappeared below the horizon. This picture was taken during a mid-winter day in Svalbard, with an exposure of half an hour.

YOUR STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE...

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

1 TAKE CONTROL OF EXPOSURE



- » **Don't rely on your camera** to expose snow and ice correctly. The built-in metering system is likely to underexpose and, unless you take matters into your own hands, will turn prize-winning pure white into miserable mid-tone grey.
- » **Switch your camera to manual** and open up your aperture by one or two stops. It's worth experimenting to get that pure white colour.
- » **Get your exposure exactly right** by first pointing your camera at a neutral tone – such as an 18 per cent grey card, available from most camera shops – rather than immediately at bright snow.

2 WORK WITH SHADOWS



- » **Use fill-flash** to reduce deep shadows. A little flash (set between minus two-thirds and minus two stops to keep things looking natural) helps eliminate dark areas, especially in eyes of predators.
- » **Experiment with a reflector** (available from camera shops – or make your own with white paper or aluminium foil wrapped around a sheet of cardboard) to soften harsh shadows.
- » **Make the most of shadows** formed by the low winter sun and use the longest and most dramatic to create moody landscapes. Be careful to ensure that your own shadow stays out of the picture.

3 EXPERIMENT WITH SNOW



- » **Try using snow as a reflector** as it throws light into shaded areas and brings out colour without creating excessive contrast.
- » **Look for the impact of low sun** as it rakes across the snow – it will show more detail and texture the nearer it is to the horizon.
- » **Use a split neutral-density filter.** This square or rectangular filter is half clear and half dark – simply position the dark half over the brightest part of the image to balance the exposure. Used upside-down, it will help to darken and retain detail in snowy areas positioned low in the composition.

4 ENJOY WINTER LIGHT



- » **Look for colourful backgrounds** (natural or unnatural) and then move into the right position to add the reflected colour to water or ice. This is a good way of turning an otherwise mediocre shot into something far more eye-catching.
- » **Make the most of soft winter light**, which isn't as harsh as summer light and doesn't destroy detail in a mosaic of shadow and highlight.
- » **Be guided by your instinct** as to whether or not the lighting is suitable. If it isn't particularly inspiring, try using filters to overcome its limitations – or simply wait for it to improve.



ESSENTIAL KIT... SEALED PLASTIC BAG

Condensation is a big problem for cold weather photographers. If you take your camera and lens straight from the cold into the warm, water vapour will condense on any surfaces exposed to air (including interior components). To minimise the risk of damage, put your camera in a plastic bag (while you are still outside), then squeeze all the air out and seal it. Moisture will condense on the bag and not on the camera. Let the camera warm up until the temperature has equalised before taking it out of the bag.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

» **Size** – the bag must be large enough to seal properly with your camera and lens hidden away inside.

ALTERNATIVE TECHNIQUES:

- » **Staging post** – let your equipment acclimatise in a porch or utility room before taking it all the way indoors.
- » **Leave the camera outside** – if you are going indoors only for a few minutes, leave your camera in the cold air.

DOS & DON'TS

- » **DO check for condensation** on your lens when you first go out into the cold, and gently remove it with a soft cloth.
- » **DO put sleeves on tape on tripod legs**, otherwise they will draw heat from your hands every time you touch them (and skin sticks to very cold metal).
- » **DON'T forget to take spare batteries**. Keep them warm to maximise their life.
- » **DON'T let film get too cold** – it can become brittle and snap in extreme cold.

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MASTERCLASS CHALLENGE UK...



Most of us will experience some snow or ice this winter, so **Andy Parkinson** explains how to get dramatic pictures when the big freeze arrives.

Working with snow

Photographing mammals in snow often produces striking graphic images as the uncluttered background focuses the eye on the subject. Don't be put off by dull or overcast days – the cloud acts as a natural diffuser as well as preventing problems with glare on the snow. It also brings out the subtler detail in fur or feathers.



Exploiting the familiar

Regular garden visitors are approachable subjects in cold weather. Putting out a variety of food will also ensure a constant supply of photographic opportunities. Get out early to make the best of any snow before it melts and, though perches set up near food supplies can be useful, keep an eye out for any unexpected encounters.



FLPA

Capturing mist and fog

You need to be out early to capitalise on the spectacular lighting that early morning mist or fog can create. Deer parks offer an accessible alternative to the Scottish mountains. Arrive well before sunrise so that you are already in position, and photograph with the sun behind your subject so that it illuminates the mist and fills it with colour.



Making the most of ice

Frozen lakes are ideal places to experiment, especially with more common subjects such as mallards. Try photographing the birds silhouetted on sparkling ice, and be ready for that extra element – two birds interacting on a leg or wing stretch. Punctuations of colour, such as sunlight on a mallard's leg, make all the difference.



MASTERCLASS READER PHOTO OF THE MONTH

Now it's your turn. Use our experts' hints and tips to take a photograph of any British species in cold weather. Use Andy's ideas for inspiration, though you don't have to photograph the same subjects. Upload up to eight images on our website and the winning shot will be published in *BBC Wildlife*.

HOW TO ENTER

Log on to www.bbcwildlifemagazine.com and click on Photo Masterclass, then follow the instructions to upload your images. Closing date: Wed 14 Feb.



'CREATIVE VISIONS' WINNER: MATT BERRY

This was a really impressive class. Matt has not only perceived this eye in gnarly tree bark, but has skilfully captured his vision for a wider audience.