

Ground Level Nature Photography with the GroundShot2 CSP

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Keep it eye level! That's my advice for dramatic portraits of small animals. Many photographers make the mistake of photographing small animals such as ground dwelling birds, lizards, snakes and insects by standing above the animal and pointing the lens down. These compositions often lack intimacy and a connection with the animal. To create dramatic compositions that provide insight into the lives of little animals, keep the lens level with the animal's eyes. This often means getting on your stomach to photograph the animal. The problem is that most tripods do not go low enough to the ground, beanbags often do not provide the needed stability when photographing animals at slow shutter speeds, and both are clumsy to move while in a prone position. The [GroundShot2 CSP](#), manufactured by Kirk Enterprises and available in the NPN Gift Shoppe, is a camera support plate designed specifically for the wildlife photographer who needs to work close to the ground yet remain mobile.

Features

- The GroundShot2 CSP looks like a mini metal sled, which is 10 inches in length, 7 inches in width, 1.25 inches in height, and weighs 37 ounces.
- Constructed of .125" stainless steel for strength and corrosion resistance
- Ball heads attach to the GroundShot2 CSP via a 3/8th inch countersunk screw
- Open side design does not trap dirt and water

In the Field

I have used the GroundShot2 CSP for the past two years, primarily for macro photographs of insects, wildflowers, and reptiles at eye level. In my experience, a 180mm macro lens with a tripod collar on the GroundShot2 CSP provides the most versatile combination because of the ability to rotate from horizontal to vertical compositions without having to tilt the camera. However, I have used the GroundShot2 CSP with my Sigma 105 mm macro, which does not have a tripod collar, to achieve dramatic compositions.

The GroundShot2 CSP provides an extremely stable platform on relatively smooth surfaces such as sand, mud, and gravel. On sand or mud, I will often push or dig the GroundShot2 CSP into the ground in order for my lens to be almost flush with the ground. The sand or mud flows onto the plate, which helps weigh and stabilize the GroundShot2 CSP for sharp photographs at slow shutter speeds. I will also use the GroundShot2 CSP on uneven gravel terrain. I achieve the needed stability by placing a weight (such as a stone) on the GroundShot2 CSP plate, and use mirror lock up and a cable release for sharp images. Unlike the circular "frying pan" designs, the open sides of the GroundShot2 CSP allows easy removal of any debris from the top of the plate without having to "pick it up and dump it out."

The simple design of GroundShot2 CSP plate ensures very little can go wrong or break. The silver finish of the GroundShot2 CSP plate does a good job of hiding the numerous scuffs as a result of being stored in my trunk next to the spare tire, where it is always available.

Although I use the GroundShot2 CSP for only certain photographic situations, I have found it to be an invaluable tool for seeing eye-to-eye with wildlife and creating dramatic, ground level compositions.



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