

## Andy Rouse's Shots of the Month

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Wimberley

Welcome to the second installment of my recent Falkland Islands trip and thanks for all the comments about last months cool surfing penguin on the cover! Before I start I again want to say thanks to the NPN community for supporting RawShooter essentials 2005, we have now passed the 50,000 downloads mark and are still growing by the day. In case you have not refreshed your copy then please download version 1.1.1 from either [NPN](#) or the [Pixmantec website](#).

Now let me take you back to the South Atlantic. Last month I concentrated on the action penguins of the region, the Gentoo. Well the Falklands actually has 4 other species of penguin in addition to this – the King, RockHopper, Jackass and Chinstrap. But of course Penguins aren't the only wildlife on the islands, it is teeming with all manner of bird and marine life.

I mainly concentrated on the black-browed albatross colonies that cling to the sides of the precipitous cliffs that surround the islands. These birds are truly beautiful with their stunning pure white feathers and red tipped beak. The problem working with them was finding some isolation, as they tended to live in very densely packed colonies. Couple that with the precipitous nature of the cliffs and I had no choice but to work and travel very light. I used my big Lowepro Pro Trekker to transport all my gear to the top of the colonies, then transferred everything to a belt system for the climb down. I knew that I could shoot everything with just two lenses – a 17-35 and a 70-200 f2.8L, but packed a 1.4x teleconverter just in case. After climbing down to the colony I began to look for groups of birds on the edge of the cliffs, which would be in isolation and have a diffuse background. Unfortunately the young chicks, which sat up clucking in their mud nests, had other ideas and several attempted to vomit on me as I crawled carefully by. Still I carried on and was almost at the cliff edge when I made the mistake of stopping too close to a chick to get a couple of quick shots. My attention was taken by the camera and I looked up just in time to see a red liquid heading towards me. A stomach full of regurgitated squid hit me square on the face and covered my camera too, disgusting is too mild a word for it. Worried about the camera I quickly cleaned it off but had nothing to wipe myself off with so just left the squid there for the rest of the day. It stank, and matted my hair better than any stylists gel, but at the end of the day it was just food. Finally reaching the edge of the cliff I could start work.

When in seabird colonies I always try to keep everything simple and highlight the beauty of the subject. I also try to look for unusual angles. The main problem for me was the usual concern of not overexposing the whites which all seabirds seem to have in abundance. After one experience trying to photograph the albatross in bright sunlight, from which I only kept one image, I learnt my lesson and picked cloudy conditions. I new that a combination of the flash with a diffuser cup and my RawShooter Fill light tool would ensure that the images were well balanced and not too dark. In fact stormy conditions always yield interesting results, as you'll see later in this yarn. I always try to show the main feature of each seabird that I photograph and with regards to the albatross that feature were the enormous straight wings. I had several good sessions with general flight photography but thought that I was missing something. Then one evening, after one too many whiskeys on the cliff edge, I decided to create art. I set the camera to a very slow shutter speed of 1/20th sec. and to fire in second curtain synchronization mode. Then I stood up, steadied my wobbling legs (due to the wind entirely and nothing to do with the empty flask) and tracked an albatross as it sailed by beneath me. After a few attempts I began to predict their flight path and started to nail some good results. The trick with this kind of photography is to leave plenty of space around the frame and to keep panning whilst the shutter is open. After an hours effort I finally got one image that I'm really pleased with and which I think shows the albatross in a way that they'd like.



The weather in the Falklands is very unpredictable and can change within a few minutes. Twice on my trip I was stranded for a couple of days due to adverse weather but the final one was a blessing in disguise. I was at a loose end for a day and that is a bad situation for everyone as I'll start becoming an amateur car mechanic and fiddling with anything electrical. Seeing the nightmare of Rouse with a spanner, the owner of the island decided to take me to a special place. As we scrambled down the cliffs I could see a long line of RockHopper Penguins making their way up from the sea. Then, as we rounded a corner, I saw a sight that will make me laugh even on my darkest days. A group of RockHoppers were having an impromptu freshwater shower under a natural waterfall. It was so funny that for nearly 1 minute I forgot all about the camera, then realization dawned that I was being presented with a great opportunity. Slowly I crawled closer and soon was soaked to the skin and covered again in detritus. But I was smiling from ear to ear as the Rockies were clearly loving the shower so much. Slowly I raised my 70-200mm and took some test shots, with and without flash. Checking my LCD I could see that with flash the water droplets really stood out but the white chest was being overexposed; without the flash the picture was just flat. So I added a diffuser cup, dialed down the flash exposure to -3 and just shot constantly for the next hour. The Rockies completely ignored me, forming an orderly queue to get into the shower and making the most of it when they did. It was an awesome day and for once I didn't care about missing the flight.

Of course the next day the knock on effect of missing the flight hit me, my final location was going to be cut to just one night. This date was with the longest of the Falkland's time with the largest of the Falklands penguins, the King, and was cut to just one night. The great attraction of the King Penguin colony is that it is very accessible (via a 4 hour Land Rover "experience") and that it looks like a golf course! Unlike other colonies throughout their range, the Kings here are on green grass. Since time was short I arranged to arrive just before the nice evening light and to stay with the wardens overnight to maximize my time. I was immediately struck by the sheer beauty of the Kings, with their blue back feathers and colourful head markings they really stood out. The habitat was quite difficult to work in since the main colony was roped off to protect the parents sitting on eggs from any disturbance, so my photography was limited to the surrounding bachelor groups. I spent that first evening laying down flat on the grass with just a group of 5 penguins; every few minutes one would throw its head back and trumpet loudly for all to hear. It would be abruptly cut off by one of its rivals slapping it roundly with a flipper, at which point a "handbags at dawn" fight ensued. Although it made me laugh, I realised that the images captured so far did little justice to the penguins as they were just standard behavioral record shots. Of course there is nothing wrong with this as it gives me a good variety of material, but I always push myself to get something special that stands out from the rest. Early the next morning I was up at sunrise to try again and abruptly my luck changed. I was working with the same group of penguins when I noticed a thunderstorm on the horizon. It was really black and I knew that it would give a great backdrop for the penguins if only they would be lit by a shaft of sunlight. I positioned myself to shoot into the storm, low down on the ground and using just my 70-200 f2.8L zoom. Slowly I felt the wind increase on my face and the first few spots of rain pattered off my hat, but still there was no sign of any sun. Then a rainbow started to form, becoming more vivid against the black sky as the minutes ticked by. I composed the shot to have the rainbow streaking across the top of the frame with the penguins rooted firmly to mid frame. Then, 5 minutes later, the storm hit. I had just enough time to get my camera inside the rucksack and put the protective cover over the top before hailstones really started to pound in to me. For 20 minutes I just laid face down on top of the rucksack, sheltering my head and barely able to see the penguins some 5 ft in front of me. But it was worth it as I'd nailed an unusual shot of King Penguins that I knew would stand out from my existing collection. Getting a little wet is a small price to pay, after all the penguins had to suffer the same too.

So ended my Falklands experience, certainly one of the most memorable of my life, and a place that I'll be returning to by the end of this year. Hopefully you enjoyed it too and I wish you all the best with your shooting for the next month!

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