

## Andy Rouse's Shots of the Month

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**Wimberley**

### Kingfishers

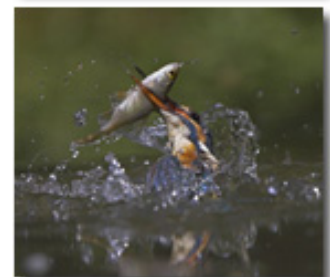
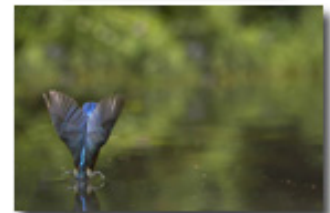
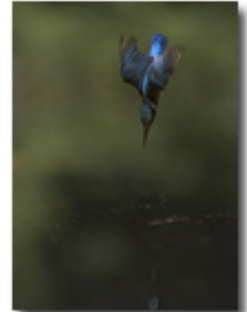
Challenges are the essence of life, it is what pumps the blood through our veins and keeps us going through adversity. It doesn't matter if your challenge is to lift the entire weight stack at your local gym or to cut down on your favourite chocolate, it is the aim of always striving to be better that really counts. As wildlife photographers we face challenges every day; the shy and suspicious nature of our subjects dictates that our photography will never be easy. Furthermore, it is precisely this challenge that keeps us going out in all weather, at unearthly and antisocial hours of the day and night in the vain hope of that elusive image.

As a professional I am no exception. I like to challenge myself regularly. Usually, this involves forcing my ageing body up the local hills on my mountain bike (surely a car is a much better option?) or putting myself in situations with animals that demand the utmost concentration. This summer however, I really decided to go for it, to try something that I have always considered beyond the realms of my ability. Regular readers of NPN will know that I am project-based, i.e. I work extensively on one subject until it is fully covered. I find that this approach works for me as I gain an in-depth knowledge and appreciation of my subject, which makes the photography easier over time and keeps me stimulated with my creative juices flowing. I have spent the glorious UK summer months working with my local kingfishers (you will have seen some of the images in a previous article). These stunning birds have really captivated my interest and I felt that I was missing a huge piece in the jigsaw of their life. How did they actually catch the fish that were then returned to the hungry chicks in the nest? I had watched it day in day out. So I sat, and watched, and learned, formulating how to get high action images of kingfishers without specialist equipment.

Of course, this kind of shot has been done before, but always in a studio or with tons of high speed flash equipment. One of the few professionals to ever attempt it is one of my agency bosses Stephen Dalton. I remember asking him once why he needed high speed flash and he replied that to freeze the kingfisher in full flight needed about 1/15,000th second. On the few occasions that I had seen the kingfisher catch something I noticed that whilst going into the water, it was a 'pocket rocket', coming out it was at a relative standstill. From experience at photographing the fast and the furious all over the world I knew that I could freeze the action with the top shutter speed of my DSLR – 1/8000th sec.

To get this kind of speed I needed to shoot in the brightest midday light, something quite alien to me, and at ISO 400. Above this and I knew that the images would be so noisy that they would be commercially useless, one reason why I chose to use the EOS 1D MK2 for its great noise performance. Even with these conditions I couldn't get the shutter speed I needed at f4 (f2.8 would have too little depth of field) so I deliberately set the exposure compensation to -2. This would give me a relatively dark image but a much needed increase in shutter speed to 1/8000th. The under-exposure didn't worry me as I knew that with RawShooter I could process the noise out of the image whilst retaining good subject detail. At the end of the day I had no choice. To minimise disturbance I decided to put the camera remotely in the water and trigger it by eye; yep no laser beams for me which added to the challenge. It also made success taste that much sweeter.

The rest is history. You can see a few of my favourite images here. It has taken a lot of hard work and persistence to get them; there were plenty of times when I felt like giving up. But I was determined to succeed and when I look back I am pleased that I did as it has given me new



confidence to try different approaches with my photography. The moral of this story is to keep on striving to improve your photography. If you fail, don't give up, keep trying and you will get your reward.

That's all for this month, now I'm busy packing for Alaska and another appointment with Grizzlies, more (hopefully) in a month's time.



Comments on NPN wildlife photography articles? Send them to the [editor](#).

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Andy Rouse is a professional wildlife photographer based in the U.K. His professional credits include hosting the Discovery Channel's Wildlife Photographer TV series, and the publication of six books, including his soon-to-be-released [The DSLR Masterclass](#). Andy's images are represented by NHPA and Getty Images and are sold worldwide. To learn more about Andy, check out his [NPN bio](#). To view more of Andy's work, visit his website at [www.andyrouse.co.uk](http://www.andyrouse.co.uk).

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