

“My photo obsession”

“I spend hundreds of hours watching this amazing spectacle”

Craig Jones Wildlife photographer

NIKON D3S | 600MM LENS | 1/800SEC | F/5.6 | ISO 1000



Craig Jones is a Staffordshire-based wildlife photographer with a penchant for waders, owls and dippers. His work has featured in *The Daily Telegraph*, *Bird Watching* magazine and Charlie Hamilton-James' *Halcyon River Diaries* book, and he also contributes to various conservation trusts, including 21st Century Tiger, Sumatran Orangutan Society and Barn Owl Trust.



Where does your passion for wildlife come from?

It dates back to childhood. I'd spend as much time as possible watching, listening and tracking wildlife in an area of countryside not far from where I grew up in Staffordshire. I'd watch for the telltale signs, and this would help me to understand the subject I was trying to get near or watch a lot more, giving me a very private and intimate moment I'd treasure.

And where do waders fit into this?

I first visited Norfolk on school trips through the Young Ornithologist's Club, and this interest has stayed with me to the present day. These birds spend our winter months feeding all around the North Norfolk coastline, coming closer during the spring tides that happen a few times each month. I spend hundreds of hours watching and photographing this amazing spectacle and it never disappoints. As an 11-year-old this event just blew me away, and even now it still leaves me breathless.

Describe your first photos...

Not great! To begin with, what I'd seen for years with my eyes and binoculars didn't really transfer to good photographs. I'm self-taught, so I set about learning different techniques – depth-of-field, good use of light, shutter speed, strong compositions – to help me capture the images I had in my mind. One of my favourite techniques is to slow the shutter speed, capturing movement and blur effect. This really works for me now and gives a different feel and texture.

What have you learned along the way?

To love wildlife, to learn about wildlife and above all respect wildlife! The camera is only an aid to capture what you see with your eyes, a method to capture the beautiful things that I witness in nature, placing a frame around something I've seen and letting the image convey the beauty in ways my words could never describe. No famous

disasters, no lucky breaks; I try to make my own luck through showing the beauty of wildlife in photography.

Camera-wise I've learned to keep it simple, work with the light, look for strong compositions, and get the image right in-camera rather than relying on Photoshop. Show the subject in its natural habitat going about its life, for a greater understanding of how and where this animal lives its life. I listen, watch and smell the air, as at dawn you can really use these skills to build a picture of what's around you, or what may have passed by moments earlier.

How do you prepare for your Norfolk trips?

I research the weather and tide times a lot – each month you really need the highest of tides, as this forces the birds closer to land, and when these two elements work together, you're in for an amazing spectacle.



Most memorable moment?

“Capturing thousands of knot, dunlin and oystercatchers all taking off at the same time.”



NIKON D3S | 600MM LENS | 1/8SEC | F/22 | ISO 200

Worst conditions? “When strong winds blew flocks of waders way off course, scattering them all around the neighbouring fields and grasslands, making their return to the sea and mudflats almost impossible.”

What's the balance between camera skills and field craft?

When I started taking photos my camera skills were nil and my field craft was my strongest element. Learning to get close to wildlife without disturbing it, almost forgetting the outside world and becoming part of the animal's environment, is something I've done from childhood. By doing this I can understand the animal better, observing their behaviour while at the same time giving the subject complete respect, allowing me a private window into their lives.

Is there a Holy Grail kind of shot?

I like to capture an animal's spirit, a moment in time; every image I take has its own name and I can tell you the meaning and story behind it. I also like to show the habitat in which the subjects live, which involves many hours of time, care, patience and field craft. I watch, listen and build a picture of what's around me, then try to capture the subjects I've identified living in that area. I always keep my distance – longer lenses allows me that comfort zone, which, along with my field craft skills, means I can get in and out before the animal has been disturbed.

Is there any non-photographic kit that you couldn't live without?

Binoculars, flask of tea and good waterproof clothing. Look after your kit and it will look after you – something I learned from my days as a soldier in the British Army.

Is there a best time of day?

Dawn and dusk, though I love the mornings – birds singing, stunning light and a fresh feel that's hard to explain. It can be a quiet, remote experience one minute, and an intense cacophony known as the Norfolk Rhapsody the next. Truly astonishing.

What do you hope to achieve?

I hope to show people the real and true beauty of wildlife, whether it's on your doorstep or in a foreign land thousands of miles away. I'd like to inspire people and show how wonderful nature is and how rewarding just spending time with Mother Nature can be. Above all my main aim is to show a wild animal in its natural habitat going about its life – this is priceless in my eyes and the foundation to my work as a wildlife photographer. 📷

For more of Craig's images, take a look at www.craigjoneswildlifephotography.co.uk

Gear Insight “The D3S never misses a beat”

It's completely reliable and perfect for wildlife at dawn and dusk. The higher ISO levels are amazing, and tracking and AF is quick and responsive. My main lens is a Nikon 600mm, as it lets me capture a subject in its environment, while affording space between the animal and me. Other lenses include Nikon's 24-70mm f/2.8 for a wider view, a 16mm fisheye for an extremely wide view, and a 70-200mm for speed and sharpness.



NIKON D3S | 600MM LENS | 1/60SEC | F/5.6 | ISO 1000



600MM LENS | 1/2500SEC | F/4 | ISO 1000



NIKON D3S | 600MM LENS | 1/3200SEC | F/8 | ISO 1000

Shot analysis

Shutter speed Look closely and you'll see the blurred outlines of waders in the upper right half of the frame. This effect is created by Craig using a slow shutter speed of 1/60sec, which gives an impressionistic feel to the shot.

Composition The rule-of-thirds is a simple device that can bring balance to a shot. Craig has used it to great effect here – the horizon sits on the lower third, while the waders dominate the upper two thirds. Perfect.

Tone At first glance we thought this was a black & white shot. But we were wrong. This was shot at dusk on a dull day, giving the shot a monochromatic feel without the need for Photoshop. There's just a hint of blue in the sky.