



# The System for Great Bird in Flight Photography

Lee Hoy  
B&H Photo & Video  
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OM  
SYSTEM

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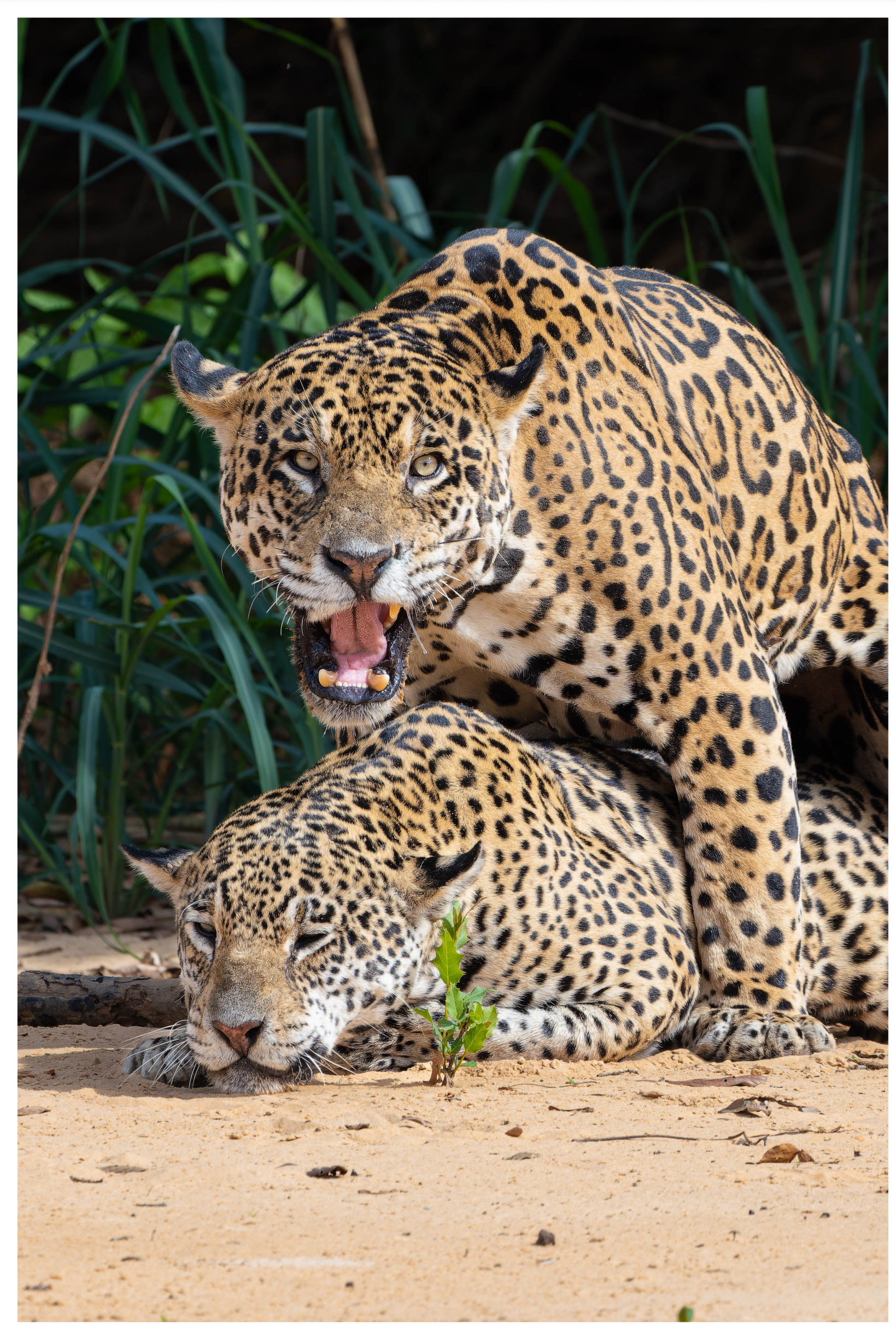
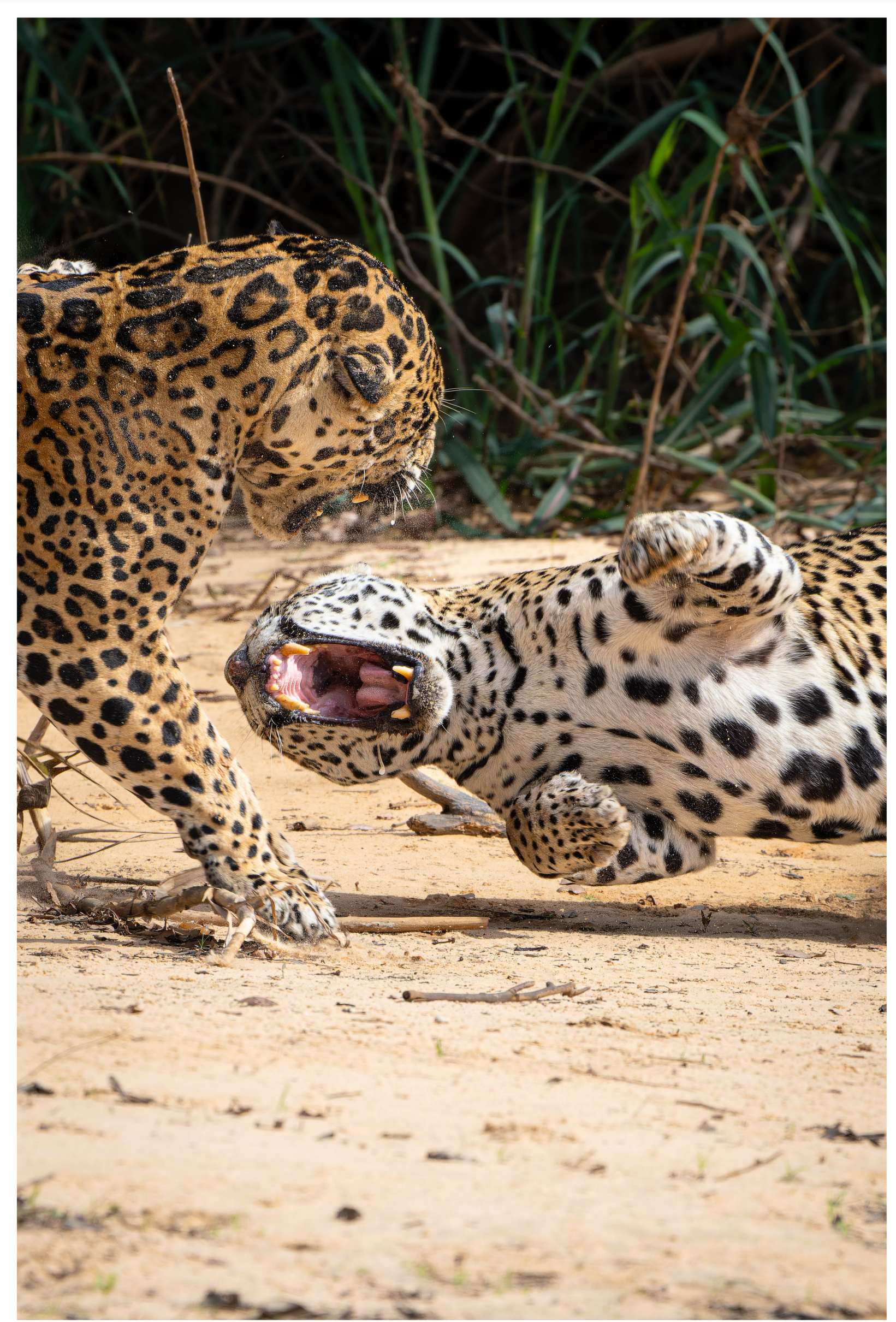
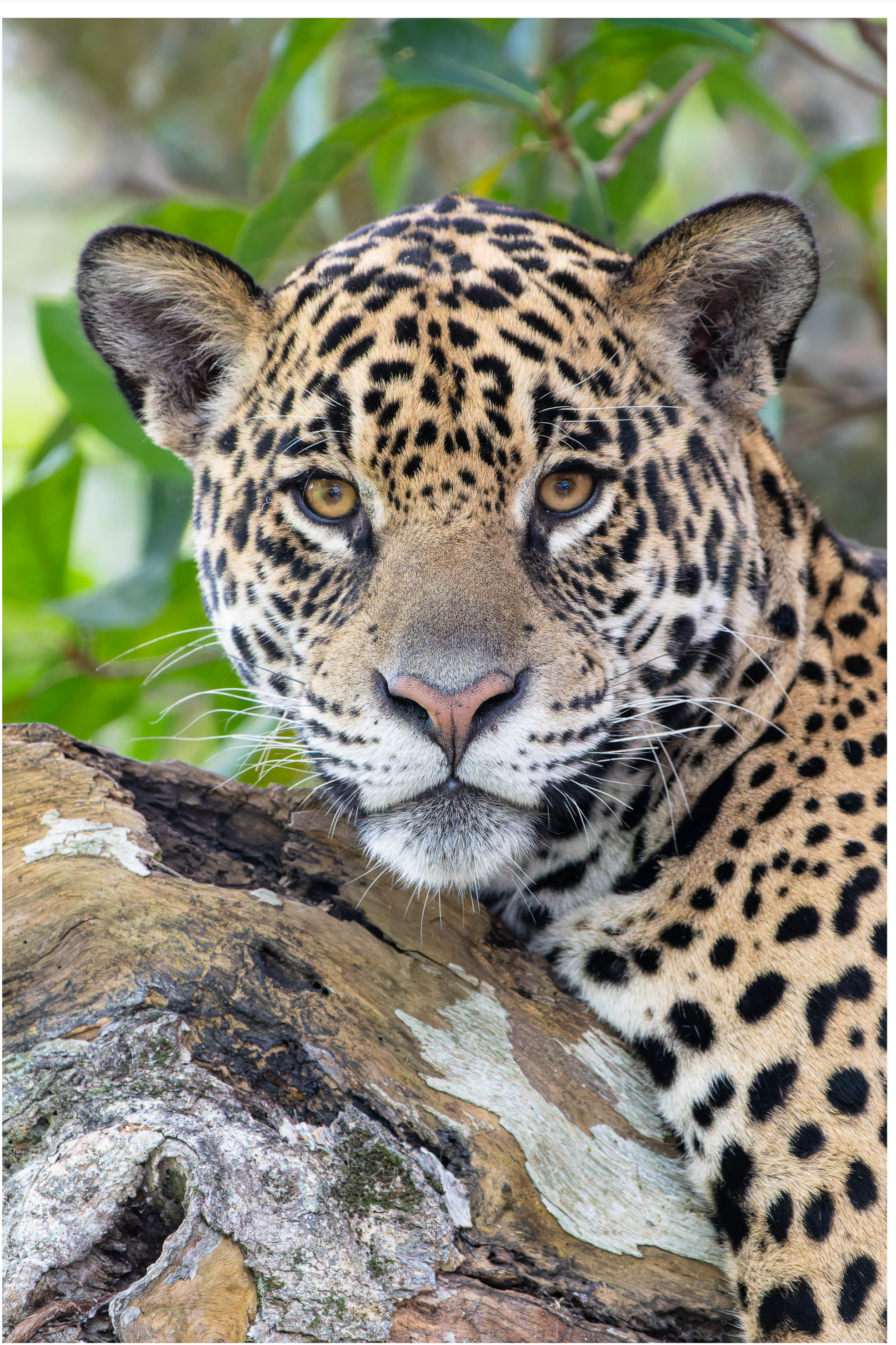


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# Today's Topics

The Goals

The Struggles

System #1 - The Subject

System #2 - The Setting

System #3 - The Light

System #4 - The Autofocus

System #5 - The Drive Mode

System #6 - The Exposure

System #7 - The Composition

The Success



# The Goals

The Evolution of the Bird in Flight Photographer



# Goal #1

A sharp image of a bird in flight.



## Goal #2

A sharp *and* a properly exposed image of a bird in flight.



## Goal #3

A sharp, properly exposed,  
*and* well composed image  
of a bird in flight.





## Goal #4

A sharp, properly exposed, well composed, *and* beautifully lit image of a bird in flight.



## Goal #5

A sharp, properly exposed, well composed, beautifully lit, *and* a nice background image of a bird in flight.



## Goal #6

A sharp, properly exposed, well composed, beautifully lit, nice background, *and* a visually compelling image of a bird in flight.



# The Struggles

Almost, but Not Quite Images



# Struggles

## Subject Not Sharp

- Missed Focus (Something in the Image is Sharp, but Not the Subject)
- Camera Movement (Everything in the Image is Blurry)
- Insufficient Depth-of-Field (Aperture is too Large)
- Shutter Speed is Too Slow (Background or Other Objects May be Sharp, But Not Subject)



# Struggles

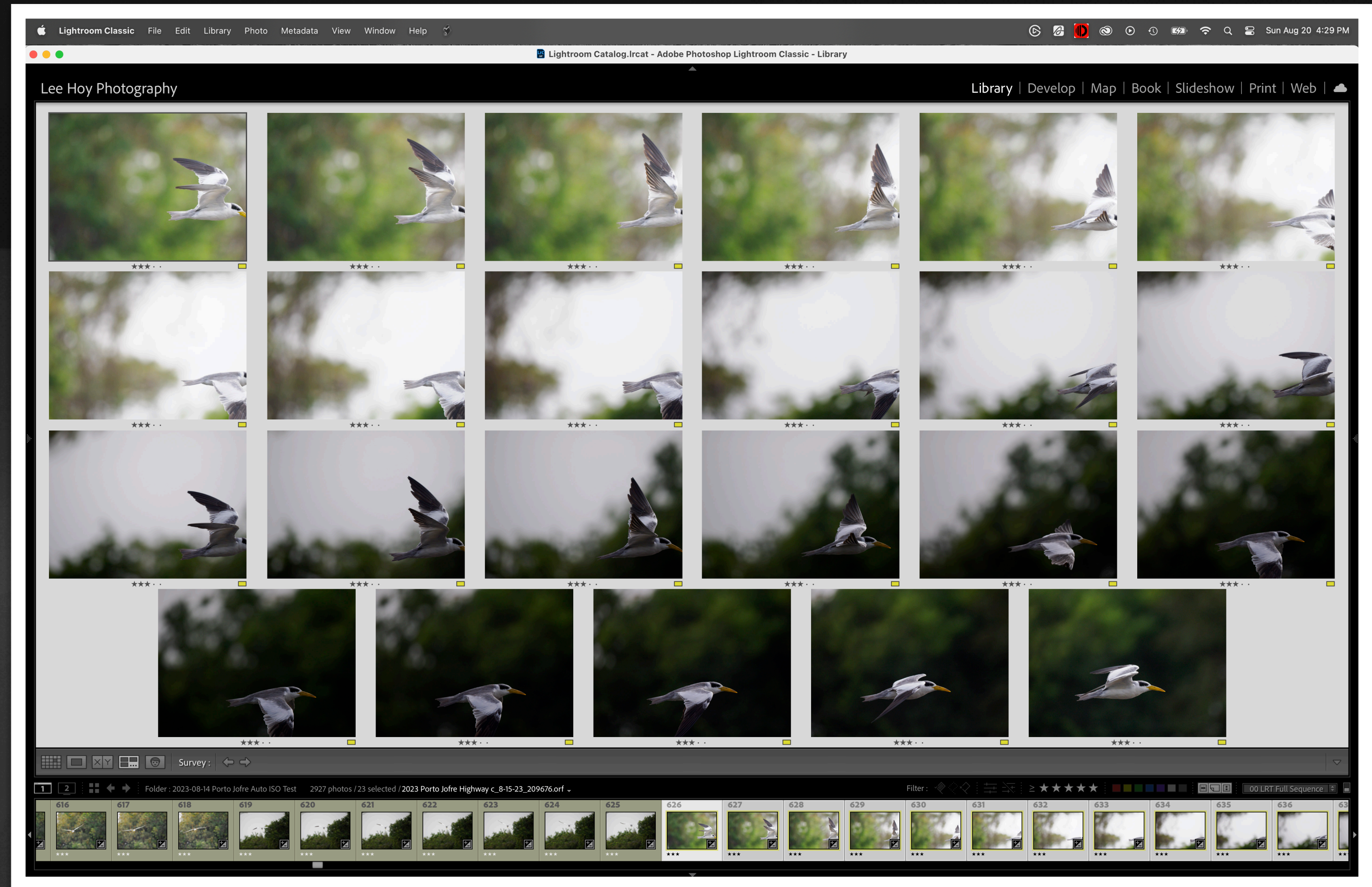
## Too Slow a Shutter Speed

- Using Aperture Priority Mode
- Using Auto ISO
- Using a Shutter Speed too Slow for Specific Species
- Worried about Noise So Using Too Low an ISO



# Struggles Not Properly Exposed

- Using Auto ISO\*
- Using Aperture Priority Mode
- Relying on Camera Meter
- Not Using Histogram or Highlight Alerts
- Not Exposing to the Right (ETTR)



# Struggles

## Poor Background

- Not Setting Yourself Up for a Great Background
- Terrible Light
- Ugly Sky
- “Busy” Backgrounds
- Hot Spots
- Sometimes You Just Can't Help It





# Struggles

## Poor Composition

- Bird Too Far Forward/Too Far Back in Frame
- Bird Too High/Too Low in Frame
- Clipped Wings/Body in Weird Position
- Visual Balance is Off
- Focus Point is Always in the Middle & So is the Subject



# System #1

## The Subject





Birds Perch, Take-off, and Land Facing the Wind



Raptors often Defecate Before Taking Flight



Ducks, Geese, and Cranes Fly Out Early to Forage



Predator & Prey Interactions



Parasitic Behavior



Learn to Group Birds by "Flight Speed"





Learn Flight “Styles” by Bird Families

# System #2

## The Setting



# The Results



# The Setting

## Setting the Stage

- Reading the Wind Direction
- Light Quality, Quantity, & Direction
- Watch Your Position
- Prospecting Potential Backgrounds
- Potential AF Pitfalls
- Secure Footing/Stability





Birds Will Often “Hang” into a Strong Wind

Image Courtesy of Kevin Loughlin



Light Quality, Quantity, & Direction



Watch Your Position - "Close to the Cliff & Birds"



Watch Your Position - "Further Away from Cliff & Birds"





Watch Your Position - "Further Away from Cliff & Birds"



Prospecting Potential Backgrounds



Potential AF Pitfalls



*Secure Footing/Safety*

# System #3

## The Light



# The Light

## It is More than Happenstance

- Orient Yourself for the Light You Want
- Circadian Rhythm of Natural Light
- Learning to Read & Chase Natural Light





Orient Yourself

# Circadian Rhythm of Natural Light

## Daily Light Cycles

- Night Time (Sun is below  $-18^\circ$ )
- Astronomical Twilight (Sun is between  $-18^\circ$  and  $-12^\circ$ )
- Nautical Twilight (Sun is between  $-12^\circ$  and  $-6^\circ$ )
- Civil Twilight (Sun is between  $-6^\circ$  and  $0^\circ$ )
- Blue Hour (Sun is between  $-6^\circ$  and  $-4^\circ$ )
- Golden Hour (Sun is between  $-4^\circ$  and  $6^\circ$ )
- Sunrise (Sun breaks the horizon)
- Day Time (Sun is above  $6^\circ$ )





Dappled Light





Overcast Light



Harsh (Overhead) Light



Harsh (Reflected) Light



Front (Warm) Light



Haze Light



Side Light



Back Light





Emerging Into the Light



On or Off Camera Flash Light

# System #4

## The Autofocus



# Autofocus

There is More To It . . . .

- Continuous AF
- Tracking AF
- Subject Detection AI
- AF Point/Area
- Additional AF Settings
- AF Trouble Shooting





What is Continuous AF?



What is Tracking AF?



What is Subject Detection AI?



AF Area - Single, Groups, or All?





Additional AF Settings



AF Troubleshooting

# System #5

## The Drive Mode



# Drive Mode

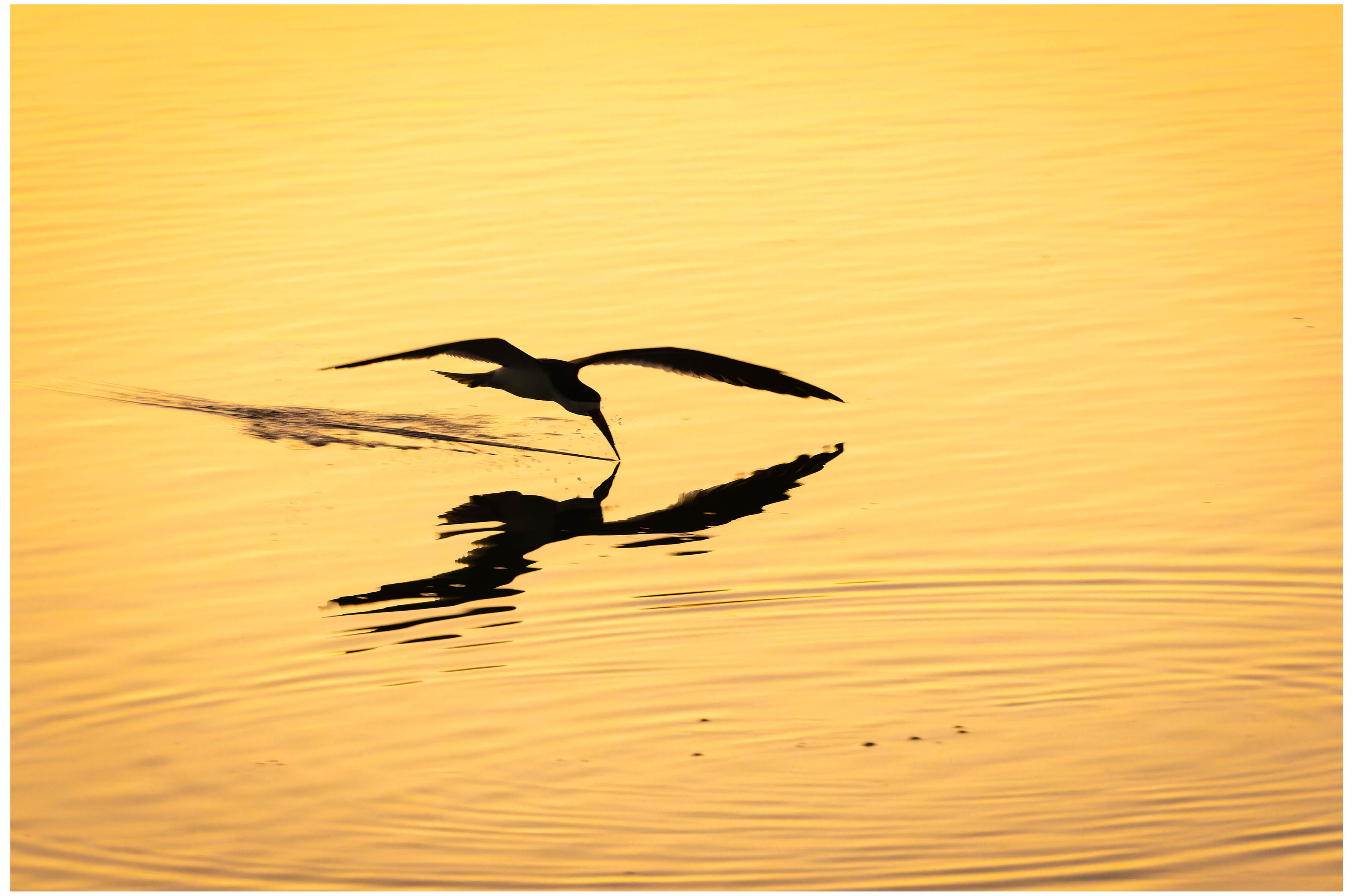
## Know Your Options

- Drive Mode = FPS (Frames per Second)
- Faster is *Not* Always Better
- Limitations (See Footnotes in Owner's Manual)
- Electronic Shutter vs Mechanical Shutter





Frames Per Second



Faster isn't Always Better - Limitations (ISO 25600)



Electronic Shutter Distortion

# System #6

## The Exposure





# Exposure

## Get it Right in Camera!

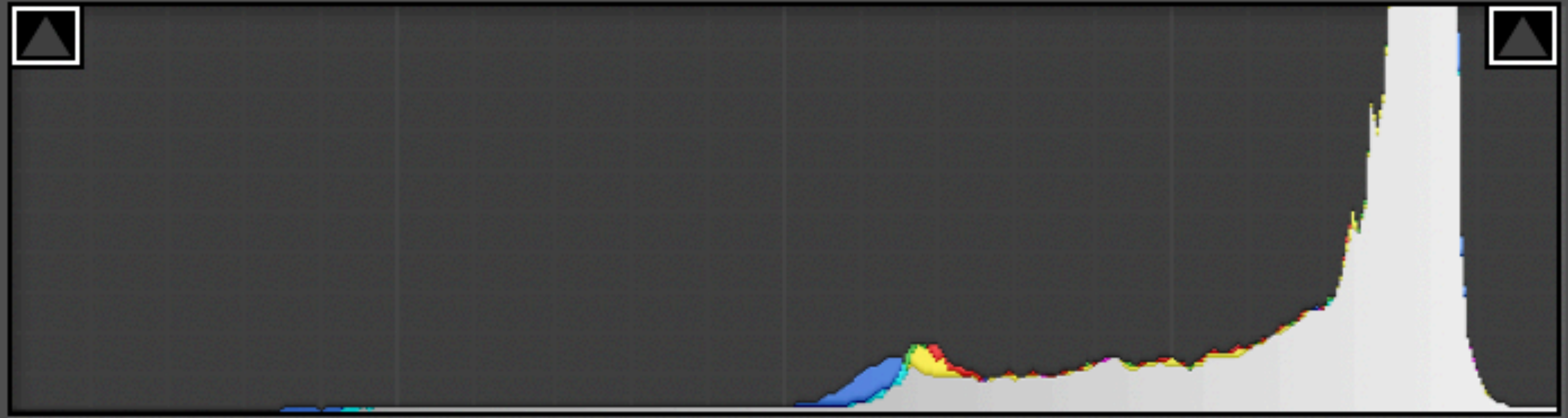
- ETTR (Collecting Data)
- Histograms & Live Highlight Alerts
- Manual Exposure for the Win!
- Shutter Speeds
- Apertures
- ISO's





Is this Properly Exposed?

Histogram ▾



ISO 800

459 mm

*f* / 5.6

$\frac{1}{3200}$  sec

Original Photo



Histograms & Live Highlight Alerts



Manual Exposure for the Win!



Shutter Speeds - Develop an Internal Database



Apertures (Wide Open to F/8.0, But this F/14.0)



ISO 6400 - Don't Go So Low



# System #7

## The Composition



# Composition

## Creative Elements of BIF

- “Rules” of Composition
- Negative Space
- Visual Balance
- Angles
- Head & Wing Position
- Flocks
- Breaking the “Rules”
- Great Backgrounds
- Cropping for Composition
- Vertical vs Horizontal
- Environmental Flight Shot





Rules of Composition



Negative Space



Visual Balance



Angles



Head & Wing Position



Flocks





Breaking the “Rules”



Great Backgrounds



Cropping for Composition



Vertical vs Horizontal



Environmental Flight Shots

# The Success

What We Hope For . . .



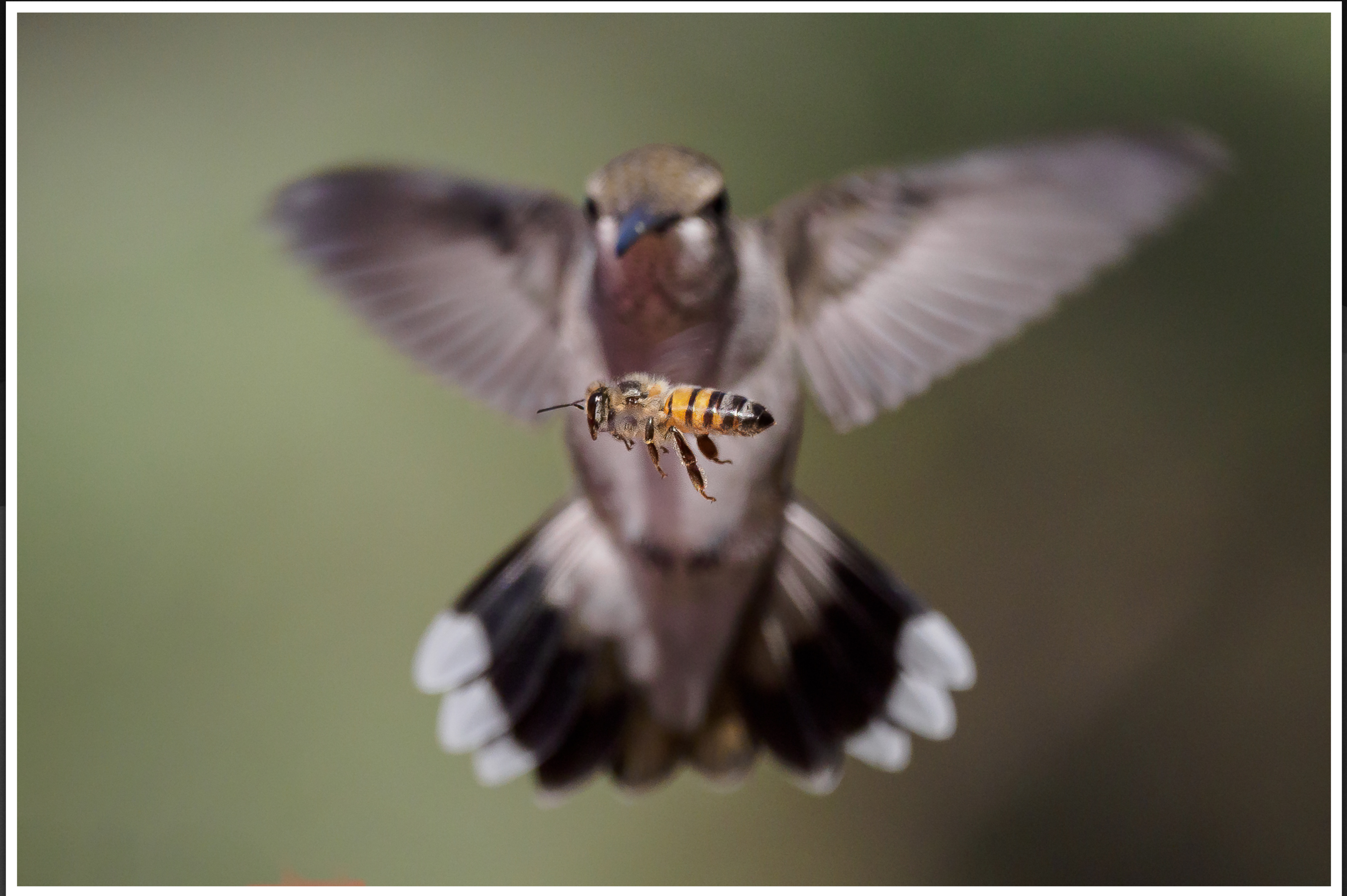


















Bosque del Apache - Dec 2023

Yellowstone in Winter - Jan 2024

Amazon Riverboat Cruise - Feb 2024

Alaska Inside Passage - May 2024

Cuba - April 2024

Galapagos - July 2024



Mastering Birds in Flight - Oct 2023



Costa Rica Bird Photo - March 2024



Texas: Macro Workshop Oct 2023



Winter in Grand Teton - Dec 2024



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