



PHOTO MASTERCLASS PART 12

in association with
TAMRON

WET WEATHER WILDLIFE



It's a mistake to assume that you need good weather to take good photos – sometimes the opposite is true. This month we reveal how stormy skies and pouring rain can be your friends, bringing intriguing light, mood and emotion to your images.

WITH WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER MARK CARWARDINE

WE ARE FORTUNATE as photographers in Britain – we have lots of wet weather. But how can that be good? Heavy cloud, drizzle, showers and rainstorms put a stop to most people's photography and, since camera equipment can be fragile, taking it anywhere near rain is usually considered foolhardy. But when the going gets tough, the opportunities for picture taking increase exponentially. Those who stay indoors are missing out.

Non-photographers mistakenly believe that the best pictures are taken on sunny days with cloudless blue skies. But they couldn't be more wrong. Bright overhead lighting produces horribly contrasty pictures with washed-out colours. In fact, many serious photographers are prepared to wait hours and hours for the sun to

disappear behind clouds. They know that cloud cover filters out a lot of the blue and ultraviolet wavelengths in daylight, making other colours appear more saturated.

Most of all, photographers love dramatic weather. Dark, stormy skies lend an air of emotion and depth that is missing from sunny, chocolate-box skies. When the heavens finally open and the rain comes, there are opportunities everywhere, from broad, sweeping landscapes to the raindrops themselves. And finally, when the storm has passed and the rain has stopped, everything glistens – enhancing picture-taking potential even further.

This month we'll stop being negative about wet weather and start getting up in the morning thinking, "Yippee, it's raining!"

▲ *Black Ducks in Rain* by Jim Brandenburg. The jumping water testifies to the heaviness of the rainstorm – and the stoicism of the ducks and the photographer. The conditions give a silvery glow to the lake itself, with the islands and promontories looming mysteriously.



MEET THE EXPERT...

Every issue, our world famous photographers share their knowledge and skills.

JIM BRANDENBURG USA

Wildlife photographer Jim Brandenburg has produced 19 magazine stories for *National Geographic*, published many best-selling books (including *White Wolf* and *Chased by the Light*) and won a multitude of awards.



"I was brought up on the prairies," says Minnesota-based photographer Jim Brandenburg, "where extremes of weather are the norm." He laughs when I mention the vagaries of British weather. "We experience everything from Saudi Arabian heat and tornadoes to high-Arctic cold and hail the size of grapefruits," he says. "So, as a photographer, I've learned to embrace it all."

"Bad weather for many people," says Jim, "is good weather for me. While others are running for cover, I'm grabbing my camera gear." He loves fog, snow and rain. He protects his camera with a simple rain jacket or an umbrella, but doesn't get too upset if it ends up soaking wet. "Most modern cameras are surprisingly waterproof," he says

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optimistically, "and they usually dry out in the end." However, it's probably wise to take precautions (see p66).

Jim has travelled the world taking photos, but now works mostly in his beloved Minnesota. He lives in boreal forest on the edge

of a vast wilderness complete with wolves and loons. "But everyone has something interesting in their backyard," he says.

One of Jim's most famous pictures – *Black Ducks in Rain* (see p63) – was taken near his home. "We were having lunch when it started pouring, so I rushed outside to photograph some white waterlilies against the clouds. I took off my shoes, rolled up my trousers and waded into the lake. Then the ducks happened by and I fired a few shots before they disappeared from sight." His picture has become a wildlife classic – shot in the kind of weather most photographers detest.

Jim Brandenburg's top tips for wet weather photography



Misty rain removes almost all of the background, leaving only the nearest trees and a precariously perched grey heron set against a silvery void.

1 Don't worry about your equipment

Too many photographers get caught up in the modern-day obsession with cameras. But camera equipment is far less important than we are led to believe. Many professionals occasionally go back to basics and dumb down their equipment specifically to focus on the art of wildlife photography rather than the technique – often with remarkable results.



Drenched caribou caught in the clear light following a heavy shower.

2 Work in a place you know and love

The best way to develop your creative eye (and photographic skill) is to return time and again to a place you know and love. The more intimate your knowledge of an area, the better your pictures will be. This is particularly true when shooting in wet weather, because you will be able to react quickly to get the best shots.

YOUR STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE...

Mark Carwardine shows you how to apply the theory to get the perfect picture.

1 WORK WITH CLOUD COVER



- » **Experiment by shooting the same subject** in bright sunshine and then with varying degrees of cloud cover. The differences can be subtle – flat, shadowless lighting is ideal for showing detail, for example, but if it is too dull, the colours become gloomy.
- » **Learn to interpret conditions** as they develop, so you can anticipate moments when the light is likely to be really good. By reading clouds, for example, you can predict the weather ahead.
- » **Try using clouds to fill space** in an otherwise empty sky. Look for attractive colours or interesting shapes.

2 SEEK OUT STORMY SKIES



- » **Make the most of stormy skies** – when you see a storm brewing, look for something interesting to put in front of it. An otherwise mediocre scene will be transformed by a threatening sky.
- » **Take advantage of sunlight**, or use fill-flash, to brighten your main subject and make it 'pop' against the dark background.
- » **Look for shafts of sunlight** bursting through clouds, especially if they are spotlighting a tiny part of the landscape – but be careful to take your light-meter reading away from the shaft to keep it bright in the final picture.

3 SHOOT THE RAIN ITSELF



- » **Shoot with a slow shutter speed** to streak the droplets of rain as they fall. Try 1/60 second or slower – the longer the shutter speed, the longer the streaks. Have a go at shooting rainy landscapes or experimenting with animals shaking the water out of their fur to maximise the impact.
- » **Shoot with a fast shutter speed** to freeze rain droplets. This will make them practically invisible, so include something to show that it is raining. Try a shutter speed of 1/125 second or faster.
- » **Shoot against a dark background** to make the raindrops stand out.

4 LOOK FOR DETAIL



- » **Take close-ups of jewel-like raindrops** on leaves, skin, fur or feathers. If it's hard to get close to a wild animal, consider shooting the feathers or fur of animals killed on the road.
- » **Don't just shoot rain** – shoot the impact of rain on plants, animals and the environment. Tree trunks, for example, tend to be darker on the wet, windward side and lighter on the leeward side, offering some interesting compositional possibilities.
- » **Look for glistening trees** and leaves after a rainstorm or the radiating ripples made by raindrops falling into calm, open water.



ESSENTIAL KIT... CAMERA RAINCOVER

Camera electronics and water do not mix well, so it's crucial to protect your equipment. The best solution is a waterproof raincover for your camera and lens. This also allows easy access to all the controls.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A RAINCOVER:

- » **Size** – it must be large enough to protect your camera and your longest lens.
- » **Waterproofing** – it should be fully waterproof, no matter how bad the weather, with sealable openings.
- » **Ease of use** – make sure you can put it on without too much fiddling and retain easy access to all the camera controls.
- » **Visibility** – transparent windows are essential to see what you are doing.

CHEAPER ALTERNATIVES:

- » **Plastic bag** – cut holes for the lens and eyepiece and then hope for the best.
- » **Shower cap** – protects the camera, at least, and the elastic band stops it blowing away.
- » **Umbrella** – the bigger the better (though beware of bright colours). This works best if you have an assistant to hold the umbrella while you concentrate on the pictures.

DOS & DON'TS

- » **DO** take great care when changing lenses to avoid rain getting inside your camera.
- » **DO** check for raindrops on the front of your lens and wipe them off frequently.
- » **DO** dress appropriately – comfortable photographers take better pictures.
- » **DON'T** use direct flash in heavy rain – the light will bounce off the nearest raindrops and form glaringly bright spots against a dark background.

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MASTERCLASS CHALLENGE UK...



Rain and cloud can be used in so many ways to create memorable photos. This month, wet weather lover **Pete Cairns** sets you four rainsoaked challenges.

Peregrine in rain

Once you understand that rain provides opportunities rather than being a hindrance, be careful to select a dark, muted background to your perching bird (it can be any species), so that the falling rain shows in the image.

Use a slow shutter speed to allow you to capture raindrops as streaks, which accentuate the 'raining' effect.



Leaf after a shower

On still days after heavy rain, woodlands take on a fresh vibrancy with saturated greens just singing at the photographer. In particular, look for water droplets on plants and tree leaves and experiment with different viewpoints. Keep the background muted and focus on individual droplets.



Stormy landscape

On those magical days when heavy showers are briefly interrupted by sunshine splintering through inky, scudding clouds, there are images everywhere. Seek out a local viewpoint in advance so that you can react when conditions are right. Still water in the composition will reflect the dark, brooding sky.



Gannet in overcast sky

Faced with a featureless, rain-laden white sky, it is easy to despair. Gannets and other flying seabirds are often photographed against a vivid blue sky, so be creative and try something new. By over-exposing slightly and panning with the bird using a slower shutter speed, you can achieve an impressionistic, ghostly feel.



MASTERCLASS READER PHOTO OF THE MONTH

Now it's your turn. Use our experts' hints and tips to take a photograph of 'wet weather wildlife' in the UK. Use Pete's ideas for inspiration, though you don't have to photograph the same subjects. Upload eight images on our website and the winning shot will be published in *BBC Wildlife*.

HOW TO ENTER

Log on to www.bbcwildlifemagazine.com and click on Photo Masterclass, then follow the instructions to upload your images. Closing date: Wed 17 January.

RULES 1) The contest is open to amateurs only. 2) Up to 8 entries per person. 3) Entry of a picture constitutes a grant to BBC Worldwide to publish it in all media. 4) Entries will be judged by *BBC Wildlife*. 5) The winning image will be published in the March 07 issue. 6) No correspondence will be entered into and winners will not be notified. 7) Entries will not be accepted by post or email. 8) Image file names must include your full name.



'REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS' WINNER: Ron Thomas
Ron's frame-filling, low-angle portrait of a common frog is full of character. The duckweed is a delightful setting and comically adorns the frog's face.