

Ten Top Tips for Photoshop Success for Nature Photographers

(plus Photoshop Elements)

1. Important Guidelines –

- If in doubt, try it.
- Experiment.
- You don't have to be perfect – use Undo (Ctrl/Cmd Z) and the History palette.
- Use a right-click mouse for context-sensitive menus
- Four important letters
- Layers can be your friend ... and you can master them!
- Mastering Photoshop takes practice ... it is a craft.
- Focus on what you need to reach your photo-processing goal – ignore the rest.
- Have fun!

2. Shoot It Right –

- No “fix it in Photoshop” – that means more work, more time, less quality
- Overexposure causes highlight and color problems; underexposure causes tonal, color and noise problems
- Sharpness problems cannot be fixed in Photoshop

3. Get Your Tonal Adjustments Right – Set blacks and whites, then do midtones:

- Blacks – Levels in Photoshop, Blacks in Camera Raw
- Whites – Levels in Photoshop, Exposure in Camera Raw
- Use Alt (Win) or Option (Mac) for threshold screen
- Recover highlights and fill shadows in Camera Raw (CS3)
- Midtones – Curves in Photoshop, Tone Curve in Camera Raw
- Keep midtone adjustments simple
- Midtones brighter with curve lifted, darker with it depressed; click and drag
- Use more than one point if needed; rarely need more than 2 or 3

Notice something? The tips are based on the photograph, not Photoshop.

4. Color – Get It Right – correct color

- Gray eyedropper in Levels – the “white balance” eyedropper
- White balance eyedropper in Camera Raw

5. Color – Refine It – get the colors you expect and want, including making colors more realistic

- Use Hue/Saturation controls selectively
- Be wary of excessive overall Saturation change
- Work specific colors saturation for best effect
- Try Vibrance in Camera Raw

6. Adjustment Layers – learn them!

- Think of them as a variable filter put over a print
- Huge amount of control
- Change your mind on adjustments with no consequences for the image
- Fastest way of making localized adjustments

7. Layer Masks – come with Adjustment Layers; learn them, too!

- Layer Mask lets you selectively turn on and off the effects of a layer
- Layer Mask only affects whether the layer’s effects are on or off, not the effects themselves
- On is white; off is black
- Black blocks the layer’s effects, white allows it
- Paint the effect on and off with a brush; can do this forever with no effect on quality

8. Layer Blending Modes to the Rescue – you don’t have to know them all

- Can be applied to any layer that is not empty; easiest with an adjustment layer without adjustments
- Three are key for the nature photographer
 - Multiply (to darken)
 - Screen (to lighten)
 - Color (to only affect color)

9. Selective Sharpening – why sharpen something in the photo that isn't sharp?

- Good for sky problems; any noise issues; keep soft-focus areas looking soft
- Sharpen to a layer
- Remove the parts of the sharpened layer that don't need to be sharp (Layer Mask or erase)

10. Simplify Your Photoshop Life with Keyboard Shortcuts – this can be a great way to speed your workflow

- Learn the basics (below)
- Set your own in Photoshop CS versions

Key general commands:

Undo	Ctrl/Cmd + Z
Save.....	Ctrl/Cmd + S
Toggle among applications	Alt/Option + Tab
Help	F1
Select All	Ctrl/Cmd + A
Copy	Ctrl/Cmd + C
Cut	Ctrl/Cmd + X
Paste.....	Ctrl/Cmd + V

Key Photoshop commands:

Fit on Screen.....	Ctrl/Cmd + 0
Deselect.....	Ctrl/Cmd + D
Hide Edges	Ctrl/Cmd + H
Show/Hide All Palettes.....	Tab
Layer via Copy	Ctrl/Cmd + J
Combine all layers into new layer on top ..	Ctrl/Cmd + Alt/Option + Shift + E
Zoom In.....	Ctrl/Cmd + +
Zoom Out.....	Ctrl/Cmd + -
Adjust Levels.....	Ctrl/Cmd + L
Adjust Curves.....	Ctrl/Cmd + M
Adjust Hue/Saturation	Ctrl/Cmd + U
Fill with Foreground Color	Alt/Option + Backspace
Fill with Background Color	Shift + Backspace
Brush size smaller or larger	Bracket keys [+]