

## “Urban Birdscaping” Tips and Tricks

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### Urban birdscaping during lockdown, an alternative compositional approach

When I am not out covering motorsports, rugby and cricket, I enjoy wildlife and nature photography and have over the years built up an extensive database on South African birds, covering more than 360 species. As a birder I've spotted more than 500 species, but I only count those of which I have a presentable photograph.

Every nature photographer will always advise you that the natural setting makes a wildlife photo more appealing, which is completely true. I aim for that as well. But now during lockdown, with all the reserves and parks closed to the public, and the same public not allowed to travel except for going to the shops or with the proper permit, travel to work, wildlife photography for us is now severely limited.

Those with large enough gardens can still use it to capture natural looking images of birds, more so if they plan the placement of feeders and water supply, choosing a natural looking type of background, or positioning the photo spot to avoid urban clutter as a background.

If you do not have that option, like many photographers in urban areas living in security estates, townhouses and apartments, it becomes important to let the creative juices flow, be more choosy and picking the right moments to capture aesthetically pleasing birding images using the urban setting to your advantage, hence my “urban birdscaping” concept.

The basic principles of photography still apply, but composition needs to be planned with an open mind because you now have to use man-made perches and environments to your advantage, and linked with careful camera settings you can achieve some quite acceptable birding images.

You should start by identifying areas where birds usually perch in your immediate surroundings, and evaluate those with good, soft light in the mornings and afternoons. Then evaluate the man-made perches and plan how you can use them to best effect when controlling depth of field, making use of lead-in lines, diagonal lines, abstract shapes, contrasting colour, foreground and background objects, textures and distancing. Never forget the rule of thirds, as well as the placement of your subject in the frame – space for the subject to look or move into. Sometimes you might find that a central placement will be more pleasing. Also remember that some might be close enough for the use of fill flash. Timing the photo for some activity by the bird, special pose etc can also be very rewarding.

With all that planning done, settle down with a coffee or whatever you like to have a sip of on a regular basis, and wait for the moments to happen. Patience is the key, and you shouldn't expect some serious results from day one, photo one. Adapt to whatever settings, positions and conditions are required as you learn from your first mistakes. In the end you just may be surprised by the results you achieved.

Playing with your images during post processing to alter their general appearance can also go a long way towards making them more appealing. Black and white conversions, adding texture or grain, high-key editing etc can all be considered.

So far in the first three weeks of lockdown I have photographed 34 species either perching or flying over my townhouse in Centurion. Agreed many of them are the absolute regulars like sparrows and

doves but photographing them in the urban environment under the right conditions is where the challenge lies. So grab that camera, start planning and have some fun again.







