

Tips for Action Photography (example: birds in flight)

(Inspired by Mike Stensvold & Melissa Groo of *Outdoor Photography* magazine)

The setup (using Back Button Autofocus):

- Action makes a tripod difficult, unless a gimbal is used. For distant subjects (e.g. birds), you might need a 300 to 600mm capability. An f/2.8 or f/4 lens is desirable, f/8 the limit.
- Set autofocus to Continuous (CF), rather than Single (SF). This allows focusing to adjust while the dedicated AF button is pressed.
- Set focus to Manual override. Using CF+MF allows you to manually prefocus a ballpark distance so autofocusing takes less time. If not, autofocus on an object at a distance similar to what you expect for your action.
- If your telephoto has a Focus Limit, set it for the desired range only.
- Use the Auto-Focus Lock (AF-L or AF-ON) button to hold focus instead of setting focus with the shutter button.
- Set autofocusing to Release Priority. This allows the shutter to fire on demand regardless of autofocus lock, or flash recharge.
- Switch AF from the Shutter Release half-press to the AF-ON or other button.
- Set the focus target(s) to center point. This allows faster focusing and keeps nearby objects from distracting the focus sensor. If an unbusy background, try matrix mode.
- Set CF Lock to On. This feature keeps the focus priority on the same object, even when other objects momentarily appear in front of your subject.
- Set the Image Stabilizer/Vibration Compensation to Off. This allows faster shutter release and possibly sharper images. (Your shutter speeds are fast.)
- Set the AF Illuminator to Off. This allows faster focusing.
- Set Exposure Control to Manual. This allows faster exposures and avoids improper exposures due to bright backgrounds or dark subjects, etc.
- Set the Shutter Speed to a high number, such as 1/1000th+, to stop action. Birds should be 1/1,600th+, with humming birds and speedsters at 1/4,000th+
- Set a higher ISO setting, such as 400 or 800. Try Auto ISO with limits. (Know your camera's capabilities.)
- Set a wide aperture to isolate your subject, but try to avoid the last couple of wide open apertures for best quality.
- Set the Sequential Shooting mode to On. Lower speeds allow better focusing.
- Set the File Format to JPG, if needed (buffer limits), to allow faster exposures.

When ready:

- Get a stance or position that allows balance throughout your motions.
- Set focus on an object near your expected distance.
- Track the subject and hold the AF-ON button to hold center focus.
- When steady tracking the subject, press the release and capture a sequence of shots.
- Follow through your motion as you lift off the release and AF-ON button.
- Chimp (zoom) for sharpness/blur. Repeat as necessary.