

**Small Animal Photography
in the Studio
by Cathy Keifer**



Benefits of Studio Photography with Flash

Optimum camera settings for every shot

low ISO for minimum noise

high f-stop for maximum depth of field

ability to stop action, even with slow shutter speed

Optimum shooting environment

comfortable air conditioned room

no wind, rain, mosquitoes, or other annoyances

controlled lighting, day or night

Flexibility in composing shots

easily change shooting positions because the camera can be handheld

maneuver animal into various positions

vary the animal's "habitat"

shoot more since animal can't escape

Ability to get shots that would be difficult in the wild

prey / defensive shots

breeding / egg laying / hatching shots

shedding / metamorphosis shots

Equipment I Use

Camera and lenses

Canon 40d

Canon 100mm macro: 1X

Canon 650mm macro: 1X to 5X for extreme close-ups

Lights

three studio flashes (can get by with one)

two Alien Bees 800

one Alien Bees 1600

remote trigger for flash

focus light

diffusion panels / reflectors

Adjustable tables / stands

subject table, made from plywood board attached to tripod

table to steady camera, made from small cutting board attached to tripod

background stand for fastening background cloth or photos

background table to hold background plants and other props

Shooting enclosures

plexiglas escape-proof boxes for frogs and other quick moving animals

spider box for web builders

tarantula home for web builders

Props

plants, branches (top of prop must look good since animals generally go there)

rock, soil, sand, pan of water

anything animal can interact with

Miscellaneous

blankets or soft material under table to prevent injury if animal jumps

lazy susan for easily turning subject

plant holders: gravel in cups, plastic flower holders

other holders: clay, tape, clothes pins

soft brushes to help move animal

Photography Techniques

My camera settings

ISO 100 sensitivity (never changed)

f-18 to f-32 aperture (usually shoot at f-22)

1/60 second shutter speed (never changed; syncs with studio lights)

Exposure

adjust light intensity / distance

use props similar in tone to animal to help avoid dynamic range problems

Focus / depth of field

focus manually with lens or move camera for best accuracy

move camera or animal so more parts of the animal are in focus

adjust camera to background distance to adjust background blur

simplify props so they are in the focus plane

Lighting: adjust flash and diffusion panels to avoid harsh or flat results

Handling Animals

Direct the movement of insects with a small paint brush

If necessary, chill fast or flying insects

put insect near blower in freezer for several seconds

or leave in the refrigerator for a few minutes

Insects can still move and are unharmed

natural chilling in the wild is often more intense

Use props to help control movement

most animals move upward, so a vertical prop can make control easier

high props may discourage jumping

horizontal branches may prevent climbing

Be persistent

keep returning animal to prop if they move

most animals will learn to hold still to avoid your interference

Getting Animals

Capture

Search near woods, fields, and bodies of water

Attract insects with plants or other things they like

Use nets and plastic jars to capture

Buy online or in pet shops

Raise your own

More variety of animals to shoot without travel and effort

More life stages to photograph than just capturing one animal

Can shoot animals in pristine condition