

# Muted Nature Backgrounds

A nicely muted background on a nature image really helps to make the subject stand-out. There are a few methods, settings and tips and tricks that can help achieve this and I have listed my most common method below.



## 1 Camera Settings

Having the camera ready to shoot is critical as opportunities appear then quickly disappear again. I use the following settings in an attempt to be ready when the moment arises.

- Mode = Manual.
- Focus = Servo & Single Point.
- Drive = Continuous.
- Shutter speed = 1/1000s.
- Aperture = Wide open.
- ISO = Auto.
- Leave the camera switched on.
- Long lens circa of 250-500mm.
- Image Stabilisation = On.

The longer the focal length of the lens the less depth of field is available at any given f-stop. This needs to be borne in mind as you assess how much of your subject will be in focus and also how much the background will be in focus.

## 2 Camera to Subject Distance

Decrease this distance to a minimum by using a hide or other stealth method. Wear muted, natural colours. Do not move too close so that you frighten off your intended subject.

## 3 The Subject

Always focus on the subject's eye and try to shoot at roughly eye level. Changing the height that you shoot from will also change the relationship between the subject and the background. Keep an eye on the background for distractions. Avoid horizons cutting through the subject or items overlapping behind the subject.

## 4 Subject to Background Distance

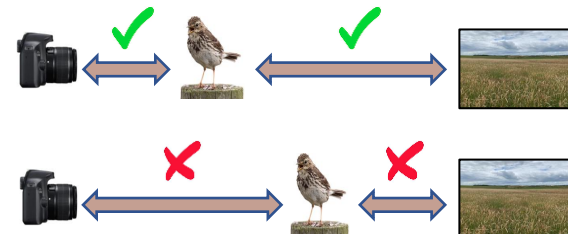
Increase this distance by selecting a distant feature as the background. Moving a small distance to either side can influence this.

## 5 The Background

Try to select a background with consistent colours and without obvious distractions. Changing your point of view sideways can influence what is captured by the camera.

## 6 Relationship of Distances

The relationship or ratio of the distances between '*camera > subject*' and '*subject > background*' makes a significant difference in creating a diffused background. The ideal situation is to have the distance between camera and subject much less than that between subject and background.



<i>f</i> / 8.0	1/1000	3000 x 2142
	—	2.65 MB 300 ppi
	ISO 500	sRGB RGB

The above image of a Meadow Pipit with Caterpillar was shot at Flamborough head, Yorkshire. The background was a field of long brown grasses which created the soft, natural and muted tones. Using a 100-400 lens with a 1.4x converter fitted limited the depth of field (how much is in focus) and as such required a '1 stop' step down of the aperture. This was enough to keep the bird in focus but rendered the background as a featureless backdrop, thus making the bird the sole point of interest in the photo.