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Focusing on **owls**

By Anthony Bucci





With a passion for photographing owls, I love hiking in a quiet forest with open ears hoping for a faint call or waiting to see one fly by.

My passion for wildlife photography started about five years ago after giving up salmon and steelhead fishing for about 20 years all over British Columbia.

Owls are very secretive and extremely challenging to find. Finding them and being rewarded for my efforts is what keeps me coming back for more.

With lots of research, reading and time spent in the field, I have been fortunate enough to find 11 North American owl species. I'm always driving around large farm fields with a forest that runs along these fields which are prime hunting areas for owls. Community parks with a forest are always home to a Barred or Great Horned Owl.

Early mornings and early evenings, when they become active, provide the best photographic opportunities. Finding them in their daytime roost is always nice, but it's important that we don't wake them. Owls need sleep during the day so they can safely hunt at night.

Finding owls is one challenge, but getting great photos of them is even more challenging since they are always in a dark area. I use a technique that allows me to photograph them at very low shutter speeds and low ISO, resulting in a crisp, grain-free image regardless of how dark the area is.

Most lenses are sharpest at an aperture of f8 and an ISO of 100 to 500 is a great starting point. Adjusting your shutter speed to allow you a perfect exposure, this will give you a speed of around 1/3 to 1/20, give or take a bit depending on the light situation.

I have gone as low as a four-second exposure on a Great Horned Owl very early in the morning and the image was tack sharp. A sturdy tripod is necessary to get a sharp image. Put your camera in live view which locks the mirror up and allows you to see what the subject looks like on the back of your camera before taking your picture. Having the mirror up also negates any vibration from the shutter.

Wireless shutter remotes are necessary for this low shutter technique to make sure you don't create any movement while pressing the shutter button on the camera. You must be completely hands-free from the camera for this to work.

Make sure the owl isn't moving around. Press halfway down on your remote to lock in the focus on the owl's face. Once the owl is completely still, you can take your picture. This technique works really well, but requires patience and practice.





Wildlife photography is more than just taking pictures. Thinking about conservation and the wellbeing for all wildlife is always on my mind.

Wildlife should never be taken for granted. Photographing owls ethically is what I strive for. I'm completely against baiting owls and harassing them. They mean way more to me than just getting a photograph.

Patience and effort will reward you with fantastic owl images without disturbing them. ✨

Anthony Bucci is a wildlife photographer based in Abbotsford, B.C. In addition to his photographic pursuits, he also volunteers with O.W.L. Orphaned Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre in Delta, B.C., and is a supporter of wildlife societies across the province. His work can be seen at www.Abucciphotography.com.

