

A BIRD IN THE HAND
By Anderson J. Martin
Photos by the Author



Western Tanager

The bird bander has an opportunity that only a chosen few have, which is to hold and observe wild birds in the hand. Many bird watchers will never have this opportunity. Although we cannot provide them with the living "Bird in the Hand" we can, however, put a good color slide or print in their hand.

Besides photographing birds for others to enjoy simply for the pictures' sake only, photographs can be used to point out special markings and points of interest which are helpful to birders and banders alike. The above picture of the Western Tanager serves another main purpose, that of documenting the occurrence of a rare or unusual bird. This photograph taken October 12, 1962 at Ocean City, Md. Operation Recovery Station, as well as others by Chandler S. Robbins, placed the Western Tanager on the regular list of Maryland birds.

Many times I have used my color slides of birds positively aged or sexed to compare with other specimens before banding. "A good picture is worth a thousand words." I say this not to detract from the fine identification manuals such as Roberts' Manual for the Identification of Birds of Minnesota, but merely to point out how useful a picture record of a bird can be, especially to the bander.

So I decided to photograph each individual species as I banded them. This required me to purchase a set of supplementary lenses for my camera. I use a 35mm Zeiss Contaflex II, which is a single lens reflex type that enables me to look through the lens and frame the exact picture. The second advantage to this camera is that it has a combination ground glass and split image range finder. The third advantage is the built in exposure meter.

I have found that the best film to use is Kodak High Speed Ektachrome Daylight Type with an ASA speed rating of 160. This film is fast enough to allow lens settings of $f/11$, $f/16$ and $f/22$ for greater depth of field and shutter speeds of 125th and 250th/second under the most varied lighting conditions.

The procedure that I use for taking close-up bird pictures follows:

After banding, weighing, and measuring the bird, I decide which supplementary lens to use. Zeiss makes several for the Contaflex II which are known by the name Proxar. The lenses range from $f = 0.1$ to $1m$. I find the most useful to be the $f = 0.2m$ and the $= 0.3m$ lens allowing you to work at distances of 4 to 7 inches and 8 to 13 inches from the subject. These lenses are all parallex free when viewed through the ground glass range finder.



The male Baltimore Oriole in breeding plumage should be enough to satisfy those who desire to see only a colorful picture. This black and white enlarged cropped print was made from a High Speed Ektachrome slide taken at an aperture of $f/22$.

I then set my distance scale on the camera to give me the subject field size for the bird subject. In each case the setting must correspond to the proper supplementary lens in use. I then set my lens aperture after taking a reading with my light meter. I take a reading both of the subject and of the background.

The correct exposure must be determined by lining up two pointers on the exposure dial. A good meter and good judgment are the keys to a well-lighted picture. I previously placed my camera on a tripod and attached a shutter release cable of about 12 inches.

Since I am right handed, I hold the bird in my right hand and move the bird back and forth while looking through the lens until the bird is in focus with the ground glass range finder. The bird should be held behind the joints of the legs close to the body, in a position to show off points of identification. I then push the shutter release cable with my left hand.

The procedure just described must be modified for indoor photography with a flash with respect to backgrounds, shutter speeds, and lens apertures. I have adapted the Hershey Sun-Ring electronic flash to use with the Contaflex II. It is mounted to the barrel of the lens by use of

step-up rings and a filter ring. The Sun-Ring flash is powered by the Hershey 100 B power pack with a push button wattage selector.

The Contaflex II camera can be purchased for about \$70.00 and the supplementary lenses for about \$20.00. The High Speed Ektachrome film sells for about \$2.75 per 20 exposure roll plus processing price. The Hershey Sun-Ring is not required for outdoor daylight pictures. It sells for \$39.95 and the power pack for \$59.00 plus the battery.

This male Cardinal was quite disturbed about being photographed so anything that his bill could reach was sure to be in danger of a pinch. A glove sometimes will protect the hand and also add to the picture by hiding the hand. This black and white enlarged cropped print was made from a High Speed Ektachrome slide. It was made at a 250th/sec. at $f/16$.



There is much satisfaction from seeing one's own bird slides or prints and sharing them with local bird or nature organizations.

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SWIFT RETURNS
INSIDE HOUSE
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On September 12, 1962 I banded a Chimney Swift at my home with band #68-17202. This Swift was banded after having come out into our kitchen from the chimney and being caught in the room. On the morning of May 7, 1963, I noticed two Chimney Swifts in my den, presumably having come into the house from the same chimney. The first of these was not banded, so I banded and released it. The second, upon being caught, was found to be the same Swift #68-17202. It occurred to me that this story might be of interest, in that this Swift not only returned to the same chimney from which it had departed the previous fall, but decided to come down the chimney and out into the same room where it was originally caught and banded. This may be an oddity.