



Join us on a year-long weekly photography challenge, designed especially for nature and wildlife photographers. Storytelling, wildlife advocacy, and creative/artistic photography is where my heart is, and I hope to encourage more photographers to not just stop at the perfect wildlife picture but to take it further. These weekly challenges encourage you to think about how your images can be composed and used to advocate for our precious wildlife (story), to hook the viewer in with compelling, creative images (creative), and to increase your technical skills and development (technical).

I have created each challenge so that most people can participate, regardless of skill level or where you live in the world (though you will notice a New Zealand bias!). Most challenges can be achieved with just a camera phone. Be warned - you will (hopefully!) be pushed outside your comfort zone, and you will likely need to do some Googling to learn more about new techniques, but that's also the point :)

This is your challenge - do as much or as little as you want and in your own timeframe - it's up to you to decide what works best for you. I do encourage you to take new photos for the challenges, rather than digging through your archives. You can take photos in advance and "bank" them and you can do them out of order. All I ask is that you try to take the photos intentionally with the challenges in mind, rather than retrofitting an image to fit the theme.

With an emphasis on storytelling and advocacy, I encourage you to post your images to social media (especially Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Flickr) and to your blog if you have one. Use hashtags to enable us to find and share your images:

- Challenge hashtags: #artofbirding2018 #aob2018 #aob2018week1...#aob2018week52.
- Find the hashtags used by the conservation projects you are photographing, e.g., #zealandia, #orokonui, so they can pick up and share your photos too.
- Use the hashtags commonly used for your critter: e.g., #kaka, #takahe, along with #conservation, #wildlife, and other more general terms.

I have also created a [private Facebook group](https://www.facebook.com/groups/aobphotochallenge/) for discussions about the challenges, where you can ask for and give help and advice: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/aobphotochallenge/>

Download an [iCal \(*.ics\) calendar](#) to load into your calendar app or join the [public Google calendar](#).

THE WEEKLY CHALLENGES...

WEEK 1: OFF THE BEATEN TRACK (STORY)

Get off the beaten track and away from the madding crowds - head further into a conservation area than you normally would, or investigate a new spot. Inspire others to do the same by taking a compelling photo.

WEEK 2: SHOT WITH A PHONE CAMERA (TECHNICAL)

Phone cameras are great! Unlike other cameras, you are likely to always have it on you, which is the first step towards being always ready to get the shot. They are also particularly good at getting into small spaces, photographing close up, and due to their wide lenses, landscapes. They are an invaluable conservation tool. For this challenge, take a photo with your camera that uses its attributes to an advantage. If you don't have a phone camera, perhaps use an old point-and-shoot or if you only have good gear (poor you!), use a wide-angle lens.

WEEK 3: GREEN (CREATIVE)

Green geckos, green trees, greenies... take your pick and then take your pic. Pay attention to your composition so that the attention is on your subject and there are no distracting elements.

WEEK 4: PANORAMA (TECHNICAL)

Most modern cameras and phones have an inbuilt panorama mode. For an added challenge and more control, shoot a panorama manually (i.e., set everything in your camera to manual mode so that each image is exposed and focused the same, then stitch together afterwards). For a further challenge, use the Brenizer technique to get a dreamy, shallow depth of field.

WEEK 5: WETLANDS (STORY)

It's World Wetlands day on 2 Feb. Wetlands are an incredibly important ecosystem that humans are still intent on systematically destroying. Tell a story about a local wetland or a critter that depends on a healthy wetland for their existence.

WEEK 6: BLACK AND WHITE/MONOCROME (TECHNICAL)

Look for contrasts and textures. Many cameras now have a mode where you can shoot directly in black and white, otherwise convert to black and white when post-processing your image.

WEEK 7: WHO'S POO? (STORY)

It may surprise you, but paying attention to poo will improve your wildlife photography. From finding an active kingfisher nest (with the spray of white around the entrance) to noticing a favourite roosting spot (from the accumulation of poo below), poo tells a story.

WEEK 8: EYE SPY (CREATIVE)

From multifaceted insect eyes to the all-knowing eyes of a wise old owl, eyes bring an image to life, especially if they have a glint of light.

WEEK 9: PORTRAIT (TECHNICAL)

Take a portrait-style photo (ie head and shoulders) of a favourite wild critter. For inspiration, it's World Wildlife Day on 3 March.

WEEK 10: IRIDESCENCE (CREATIVE)

Many birds and beetles have iridescent feathers and wings. Show off their beauty in a photograph. For those of you lucky enough to have an iridescent takahē nearby, it's Takahē Awareness month. An alternative interpretation is to show the iridescence of petrochemical contamination in a waterway.

WEEK 11: WATER (STORY)

Tell a story about water. For inspiration, it's the International Day of Action for Rivers on March 14.

WEEK 12: SEEDS (CREATIVE)

Without seeds, we have no forests. And seeds come in all shapes and sizes, lending themselves to a creative photograph that engages the viewer. This week we have the autumnal equinox (or vernal equinox if you're in the northern hemisphere), the International Day of Forests, and Earth Hour for added inspiration.

WEEK 13: FIXED FOCAL LENGTH (TECHNICAL)

Use sneaker-zoom (i.e., your feet) to compose your image using a fixed-focal-length (preferably 50mm) lens. Most of us rely on zoom lenses to get added flexibility and leave the 50mm at home, despite the fixed lens usually having better optical properties. If you don't have a 50mm, set your zoom lens to 50mm or see if you can borrow one. Bonus challenge, take a photo at f2.8 or wider and use the shallow depth of field to creative advantage.

WEEK 14: FRUIT (STORY)

Delicious fruit is nature's way to ensure plant species reproduce. A bonus challenge is to photograph an insect or bird eating fruit.

WEEK 15: FILL THE FRAME (TECHNICAL)

Fill the frame with your subject, leaving no room for background or foreground.

WEEK 16: EARTH (CREATIVE)

The ground beneath you, from the microscopic to the entire planet - it's your choice. For inspiration, it's Earth Day on the 22nd of April.

WEEK 17: WHAT IS THAT? (STORY)

Trick or confuse the viewer with a photo of something perhaps taken out of context, unusual, or peculiar. Or perhaps find an unusual insect like a peripatus that many have never seen.

WEEK 18: THE FUNGUS AMONG US (CREATIVE)

With autumn rains, comes a burst of fungi. For those in the northern hemisphere, you might like to swap this challenge with Week 44 "Signs of spring".

WEEK 19: TEXTURE (TECHNICAL)

Adding a texture to an image can take an otherwise great photograph and move it closer to a work of art. Either use double/multiple exposures in-camera or layer multiple images in Photoshop and blend using "overlay" or "soft light" blend modes. Be sure to take all the images yourself. Textures that work well include cracked concrete, peeling paint, marble, and rusted surfaces.

WEEK 20: RARE OR UNUSUAL (STORY)

Tell a story about something rare or unusual. For inspiration, it's Endangered Species Day on the 18th.

WEEK 21: 3 VIEWS OF SAME SUBJECT (TECHNICAL)

Rather than just take one photo of a subject, take three. One option is to take a wide-angle shot showing the subject in its environment, a portrait of the subject, and then a close-up of part of its body. Be sure to use similar exposures/post-processing so that the images have a similar look-and-feel. For an added challenge, present them as a triptych.

WEEK 22: LAUGH OUT LOUD (CREATIVE)

If you need inspiration, what can be funnier than a parrot? And it's World Parrot Day on the 31st.

WEEK 23: NATIVES IN MY GARDEN (STORY)

Which native critters does your garden support? For those of us in Wellington, New Zealand, we are fortunate to have rare and endangered birds in our back yards. But do you have native trees to support them? If you don't have much of a garden, look for native insects or spiders. For inspiration, it's Arbor Day on the 4th of June.

WEEK 24: WIND (CREATIVE)

To celebrate Global Wind Day on 15 June, capture the essence of this invisible but forceful element by perhaps slowing down your shutter speed to capture movement.

WEEK 25: NIGHT (TECHNICAL)

Matariki has begun and the Winter solstice is upon us - the perfect time for some night photography. Try your hand at some astrophotography or perhaps go hunting for glow-worms. Up your ISO and use a tripod.

WEEK 26: HERITAGE (STORY)

Many conservation areas have had a long history of multiple uses. Tell a story about what came before.

WEEK 27: THE HUMAN TOUCH (CREATIVE)

Humans are a force for good and for evil - tell a story about how humans have impacted your local environment.

WEEK 28: LOW KEY (TECHNICAL)

Go for the dark and moody aesthetic by taking a low key photo. This is best achieved by paying attention to your histogram, making sure that most of the pixels are to the left of the histogram. You may need to use your exposure compensation dial to overrule what your camera wants to do automatically. A few bright points can then give shape and form to your subject (e.g., rim light, side light, natural white patterns on a critter that is predominantly dark, etc).

WEEK 29: STICKY (CREATIVE)

Interpret how you wish!

WEEK 30: ECOSYSTEM (STORY)

Choose an ecosystem (wetland, forest, lake,...) and photograph a critter interacting with it. Perhaps a close-up of a bird feeding on a native flower or fruit, or a flock of spoonbills in a wetland,... something that illustrates the fundamental interconnectiveness of it all.

WEEK 31: NEGATIVE SPACE (TECHNICAL)

Frame your subject so that there is distraction-free space in part of the image. If you're interested in using your images for advocacy purposes, negative space allows room for messages and branding. Bonus challenge: add words to your image in the negative space to advocate for something important to you.

WEEK 32: OUTSIDE THE FENCE (STORY)

For those of us with a connection to the fenced sanctuary Zealandia, "outside the fence" has a very literal meaning. Zealandia has become a safe incubator for breeding birds, who then spill out over the fence to live in local backyards and gardens. For everyone else, find a local conservation or restoration initiative and tell the story about how they have had an impact outside their range.

WEEK 33: FEATHERS (CREATIVE)

Feathers lend themselves to artistic shots. Just be sure to leave behind any feather you gather as birds rely on feathers to line their nests, etc. (plus it is illegal to take feathers of native birds).

WEEK 34: BOKEH/BACKGROUND BLUR (TECHNICAL)

You can either use a wide aperture to create a shallow depth of field or ensure the background is at a distance to your subject to throw the background into blur or soft bokeh to make your subject pop.

WEEK 35: CAMOUFLAGE (CREATIVE)

Many critters use camouflage to hide from predators. The first challenge is finding them, the second is to then photograph them in a compelling way.

WEEK 36: DEATH OR DECAY (STORY)

Death and decay is all around us, and is an important part of a healthy ecosystem. Show how death supports the living.

WEEK 37: MY FAVOURITE CRITTER (CREATIVE)

Do you have a critter that you're repeatedly drawn too? For some it's the kingfisher, for me it's the kākā. The more you photograph the same critter, the more you'll understand it and bring out its personality in your images. Make us fall in love with your favourite critter too by taking a compelling photo of it.

WEEK 38: BIRD IN FLIGHT (TECHNICAL)

Photographing birds in flight is challenging for sure. It helps to learn a bit about the bird you're photographing so that you can predict its behaviour and be ready. Other hints include shooting earlier or later in the day with the sun behind you. Use a wide aperture and a fast shutter speed. Check your camera manual to see if you have an autofocus mode that will lock onto a moving target. For inspiration, the Great Kererū Count begins on the 21st, and you may find photographing these large boofheads easier than other species.

WEEK 39: BEAUTY IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER (CREATIVE)

Too often, the cutest and most beautiful critters hog the headlines. Your challenge this week is to show something not normally thought of as beautiful in a compelling way.

WEEK 40: CONSERVATION IN ACTION (STORY)

Tell a story about a local conservation effort. For inspiration, it's Save Kiwi month and World Habitat Day.

WEEK 41: ABSTRACT (CREATIVE)

Use natural patterns and light to create an abstract image. Bonus challenge is to create an abstract piece by layering and compositing multiple images.

WEEK 42: LEADING LINES (TECHNICAL)

Pay attention to lines and curves that you can use to draw attention to your subject. Using leading lines is a classic composition technique and one we should all have in our repertoire.

WEEK 43: SONG (CREATIVE)

A healthy ecosystem is filled with birdsong, but how to illustrate that in a photo? That is this week's challenge!

WEEK 44: SIGNS OF SPRING (STORY)

Will it be a burst of kōwhai blossoms or a spangle of clematis paniculata? What heralds spring for you? For those in the northern hemisphere, you might like to swap this challenge with Week 18 "the fungus among us"

WEEK 45: WABI SABI (CREATIVE)

Wabi sabi is the Japanese aesthetic of finding beauty in imperfection and age.

WEEK 46: TEENY TINY (TECHNICAL)

Dig out the macro lens and find something tiny to photograph! If you don't have a macro lens, try your camera phone as most are good at focusing close-up. Or, alternatively, use a telephoto lens. In all cases, a tripod will come in handy.

WEEK 47: VOLUNTEERING (STORY)

In two week's time it's International Volunteer day, so this week's challenge gives you a head start in finding a local volunteer project to highlight. Be sure to get permission from any people you include in your photographs before sharing online.

WEEK 48: BIRDS-EYE VIEW (TECHNICAL)

Change your viewpoint from a human level to a birds-eye level or insect-eye level. Get up high, get down low and change your angle on the world. Mind your knees and mind your balance! Wildlife photographer Tui de Roy talks of the "road kill" shot, which is the typical human-eye level looking down on a critter. What a difference it makes to get down and shoot across instead!

WEEK 49: THE NEXT GENERATION (STORY)

From baby birds to human chicks, what we do today will determine their future.

WEEK 50: FOCUS STACKING (TECHNICAL)

Use focus stacking to increase depth of field in macro or landscape photography. For this technique, you'll need a tripod or stable mount. Take multiple photos at different focal lengths, then combine in Photoshop (or similar) by first aligning the images then blending them. If you're lucky, your camera may do this automatically. And there are also apps for your phone that also do focus stacking.

WEEK 51: FAMILY (STORY)

You can interpret "family" however you like - perhaps mum, dad and the kids, or perhaps the taxonomic rank of "family".

WEEK 52: NEW BEGINNINGS (YOUR INTERPRETATION)

Wildcard Week - take some of what you've learned this year and put it all together.

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