



For the second year, 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 taking gorgeous wildlife photos but to take them 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: #artofbirding #artofbirding2019 #aob2019week1 through to #aob2019week52. Find the hashtags used by the conservation projects you are photographing, e.g., #sharemezealandia, #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.

Join our [Facebook group](https://www.facebook.com/groups/aobphotochallenge/) and post your photos, discuss the challenges, and get and give help: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/aobphotochallenge/>

Download an [iCal \(*.ics\) calendar](#) or link to the [public Google calendar](#).

THE 2019 WEEKLY CHALLENGES

TO BOLDLY GO (STORY)

Week 01: 31 Dec 2018

Let's start the New Year with some fresh air and exercise. Put on your walking shoes, grab your camera and a friend, and explore a wildlife or conservation reserve that you've never been to before. Post a photo (or more) and describe what you experienced. Advanced challenge: blog about what you experienced.

A WORM'S EYE VIEW (TECHNICAL)

Week 02: 07 Jan 2019

Change your normal point of view, mind your knees, and get down in the dirt with the worms - what does the world look like from down there? You can point your camera either up or down! If your knees aren't up to it, get creative and use a remote shutter (many cameras can now be remotely controlled by your cellphone).

MOBILE PHONE MAGIC (CREATIVE)

Week 03: 14 Jan 2019

Using your phone camera, experiment with creative effects. There are a million apps out there that can turn an ordinary photo into something engaging. Look for Distressed Effects, Tiny Worlds, ... or perhaps try out a clip-on lens. If you don't have a phone camera, use the widest lens you have and try for a different perspective.

SEASON (STORY)

Week 04: 21 Jan 2019

Regardless of what season you're in, tell a story about what makes your area special this time of year.

FROM MY BACKDOOR (CREATIVE)

Week 05: 28 Jan 2019

The potential for creativity is all around you - you don't have to venture out to take an amazing shot. For this week's challenge, take a photo from just outside your door (from work or home - whatever suits). If it's truly uninspiring, try macro - there's always some little critter going about its life. Advanced challenge: take multiple photos and composite them together - e.g., overlay textures of cracks, dirt, mould.

MANUAL MODE (TECHNICAL)

Week 06: 04 Feb 2019

Once upon a time there was only manual mode, yet people still took photos. Conquering manual mode is liberating for many photographers - sometimes it makes photography (especially bird photography) easier, would you believe! Even if you decide to continue using the other modes, having an understanding of the "exposure triangle" and how manual mode works will improve your photography no end and your confidence even more. Deep breath, turn the dial to M. Find out where to set your shutter speed, aperture, and ISO (yes you might need to look in your user manual), and take your time to experiment with what effects

they produce. There are loads of excellent tutorials on the internet to help you. After a bit of experimentation, the specific challenge is to shoot a scene on Auto-everything mode and then see if you can improve on the image by using Manual mode. Advanced challenge: go fully manual and use manual focus and manual white balance mode too - take advantage of this by shooting a subject which would be hard to do automatically: e.g., a white or black bird sitting behind twigs.

HABITAT (STORY)

Week 07: 11 Feb 2019

Take a photo (or photos) that describes the habitat of a specific organism - i.e., its natural home or environment.

BLACK AND WHITE (CREATIVE)

Week 08: 18 Feb 2019

Shoot in black and white mode. To find interesting subjects, look for contrasts and textures. See if your camera can show you a black and white view through the viewfinder to aid in composition. Advanced challenge: using B&W software to add film effects and borders, such as NIK.

LANDSCAPE (TECHNICAL)

Week 09: 25 Feb 2019

A luscious landscape instantly transports the viewer. But there are technical things to consider like which lens, aperture, and focal point to use. There's no one right decision, but whatever you choose to do, do so intentionally. Advanced challenge: shoot a landscape using a technique that requires multiple images (e.g., panorama, focus stacking, HDR, or if you're brave - all three!).

FRAME WITHIN A FRAME (CREATIVE)

Week 10: 04 Mar 2019

Frame your subject creatively, by looking for natural (or manmade) frames such as branches, leaves, or other elements.

LITTER (STORY)

Week 11: 11 Mar 2019

Take a compelling photo of how litter is impacting a natural environment. And perhaps take a bag with you to pick some of it up! Advanced challenge: can you use creative and compositional techniques to create a juxtaposition by making the litter look beautiful and ugly at the same time?

PAINTING (CREATIVE)

Week 12: 18 Mar 2019

Take a photo then turn it into a painting. How? You can use painterly effect filters in Photoshop, Topaz Impression, or various apps (many are free or have free trials), or print out your photo and embellish it, or perhaps pull out those paints and brushes and create a painting based on the photo - it's totally up to you!

SPLIT TONE (TECHNICAL)

Week 13: 25 Mar 2019

Split toning adds a colour cast to the highlights and shadows of your photo. It can be subtle or dramatic. Split-toning is particularly lovely with black and white images but it can work for any image and can be a nice way to integrate a series of photos. Advanced challenge: split-tone a set of related photos.

CLOUDS (CREATIVE)

Week 14: 01 Apr 2019

Clouds make for the most beautiful patterns. You can choose whether you keep the horizon and foreground in your photo or whether you shoot just the clouds themselves. Advanced challenge: add a bit of post-processing magic to add a dark-and-moody look. Hint: try increasing the contrast or clarity setting; try decreasing the saturation and level of the blue channel to darken a blue sky.

SERENITY (STORY)

Week 15: 08 Apr 2019

Counter the bad news cycle by taking a serene image and share it with the world so we can all experience a moment's peace.

BOUNCE (TECHNICAL)

Week 16: 15 Apr 2019

You don't need expensive lighting rigs to improve the lighting on your subject. All you need is something white or reflective e.g., a piece of white cardboard or tinfoil. Find a subject - a flower perhaps - and take a photo. Now without changing anything, use your reflector to bounce light back onto your subject. The light may come from the sun or a lamp. Try moving the reflector around and look closely at how the light changes. Now see if you can improve on your original photo. Hint: use a tripod if you have one so that you have a hand free for the reflector.

HAIKU (CREATIVE)

Week 17: 22 Apr 2019

Go out into nature and sit awhile. Soak in your surroundings and use all your senses. Don't rush to take a photo. When you're ready, contemplate a photo that might capture some of what you're feeling, then take it. Now compose a haiku, or if that's not your thing, a limerick, an ode, a lyric. Share it so we can experience that moment too.

RIVERS (STORY)

Week 18: 29 Apr 2019

So many of our rivers are dying. Tell a story about a local river or stream - a good news or a bad news story - you choose.

BLUE HOUR (TECHNICAL)

Week 19: 06 May 2019

That magical moment just before dawn or just after sunset lasts only a few minutes but makes for some beautiful light. Use a tripod or support as your shutter speeds will be slow. Advanced challenge: take a photo of a crepuscular critter, which are most active at this time of day.

CLIMATE CHANGE (STORY)

Week 20: 13 May 2019

How is climate change affecting where you live? If you haven't been noticeably impacted yet, document something that is predicted to be impacted within the next few years.

WATERFOWL AND OTHER WATER BIRDS (CREATIVE)

Week 21: 20 May 2019

Can you find a creative way to photograph a bird on the water so that it looks dynamic rather than a passive rubber duck?

OUTSIDE YOUR COMFORT ZONE (TECHNICAL)

Week 22: 27 May 2019

Do something that scares you a bit - feel the fear and do it anyway. Will it be a close-up photo of something with too many legs? Trying flash photography? Photographing a person? Spinning the dial on your camera to Manual mode? Take the plunge and let us know how you fare.

MY FAVOURITE CRITTER (STORY)

Week 23: 03 Jun 2019

This year "My favourite critter" is a "Story" challenge - and specifically a story about a challenge your favourite critter faces in its survival.

VIDEO (TECHNICAL)

Week 24: 10 Jun 2019

Virtually all cameras these days come with video capability, but have you truly explored how it works? (I haven't!) If you're like me and just press the red button and hope for the best, this week's challenge is designed to give us a push. Take the next step and find out how to do something more with video such as changing the focus mode to better suit the subject, use slow-motion or fast-motion capture, or similar. Advanced challenge: create an Instagram IGTV or Story video with overlaid text or effects.

MUCKING IN (STORY)

Week 25: 17 Jun 2019

Tell a story about a local group who are mucking in and making a difference. You can either shoot the results of their labour or the people themselves in action. Be sure to get permission from any people you photograph, especially if you post the photo online.

MOTION BLUR (CREATIVE)

Week 26: 24 Jun 2019

Rather than aiming for that tack-sharp image, use a slow-shutter speed to blur motion of an animal or plant in a creative way. Advanced challenge: use panning and a slow-shutter to capture the sense of movement of a bird in flight.

ENVIRONMENTAL PORTRAIT (TECHNICAL)

Week 27: 01 Jul 2019

Hold on to your hats - this may push you well out of your comfort zone (it does for me!). Part of telling stories about wildlife advocacy is highlighting the incredible people doing conservation work. An environmental portrait is a fabulous way to tell a story with a picture of the subject in their environment. Rather than trying to isolate your subject, you're looking to show them in a setting that describes who they are. Be sure to ask the person permission to use their photo if you intend to post it online. Advanced challenge: use your photo to blog about the amazing work your subject is doing and why it's important.

SYMBIOSIS (STORY)

Week 28: 08 Jul 2019

Show an example of symbiosis, where two organisms have a close, biological interaction.

BACKGROUND (TECHNICAL)

Week 29: 15 Jul 2019

Controlling a messy background can make or break your photo but there are some hacks you can use if just moving your feet isn't enough. This technique works well when photographing flowers and fungi. Use a piece of dark card or fabric - matt not shiny - and position it behind your subject, far enough away that it blurs. Advanced challenge: use a textured background that enhances but doesn't compete with your subject - some photo-artists even print out textures onto boards so that they don't have to composite in a background afterwards.

BOKEH (CREATIVE)

Week 30: 22 Jul 2019

Last year bokeh was a technical challenge. This year it's creative. Open up your aperture to its widest setting and look for sparkles. Look at how the size of the bokeh changes depending on how close your subject is to the lens and how far the background is from the subject. Advanced challenge: use an aperture template for your lens to create shaped bokeh - or experiment with attaching a card with a shape cut in it over your lens.

WINGS (STORY)

Week 31: 29 Jul 2019

Tell a story of flight

RAINBOWS (CREATIVE)

Week 32: 05 Aug 2019

Either take a photo of a rainbow or, if nature doesn't cooperate, light refracting through a bubble or dewdrop, etc.

STARBURST (TECHNICAL)

Week 33: 12 Aug 2019

Learn how to take a photo with a starburst effect by setting your aperture to be very narrow and pointing it at a point light source (fairy lights, street lights, the sun). **DON'T LOOK THROUGH THE LENS** if you use the sun! This technique works well with low sun through twigs. You'll likely find a tripod handy as the shutter speed might be quite long.

SPIRALS (CREATIVE)

Week 34: 19 Aug 2019

Nature is filled with spirals - from sunflower seeds to snail shells and more. Show a natural spiral in a creative, compelling way.

LET YOUR PHOTO FLY FREE (TECHNICAL)

Week 35: 26 Aug 2019

Give a gift to the world and donate a photo to Wikimedia Commons for anyone to use. We all use Wikipedia so I believe we should all give a little back too. You can choose what level licence to give (I use CC-BY-4.0: free to use including commercially, but with attribution). Think about a subject that is special to where you live or an exotic place you have travelled. Do you have photos of rare species? A sexy slime mold? A rare lichen? The more esoteric the better - just be sure it's correctly identified!

BUSY BEES (STORY)

Week 36: 02 Sep 2019

Bees are vital to many ecosystems but are imperilled by human activity. Tell a story about either your native or introduced bees.

DOUBLE EXPOSURE (CREATIVE)

Week 37: 09 Sep 2019

Somewhere in your camera menu will be a function that allows you to take multiple exposures and overlay them. Use it creatively to superimpose a second picture on top of your main photos. Advanced/Alternative: using Photoshop, blend multiple photos together using blend modes and masking.

CARBON (STORY)

Week 38: 16 Sep 2019

Carbon footprint, carbon sequestering, carbon sink,... carbon is the story of our time. Find an angle and help us understand the role carbon plays in our environment. Advanced: carbon dioxide and methane are both invisible gases - can you find a clever way to illustrate them or their effects visually?

COMPLEMENTARY COLOURS (TECHNICAL)

Week 39: 23 Sep 2019

Check out the colour wheel and choose two complementary colours (think red-green, yellow-purple, and blue-orange) and take a photo where those two colours dominate. Don't get too hung up on exactly which colour model to use - just choose one :). Advanced

challenge: go for three colours that are split complementary where one complementary colour is split into two nearby analogous colours.

A CALL TO ACTION (STORY)

Week 40: 30 Sep 2019

Cover a local event that has the environment at its heart - perhaps a protest, an art exhibition, a bioblitz,... Advanced challenge: blog about the event

INTENTIONAL CAMERA MOVEMENT (CREATIVE)

Week 41: 07 Oct 2019

Spin your camera round and round or up and down to get an image with intentional camera movement. Aim to do so in a way that adds to the subject you're shooting (e.g., up and down movement to capture the majesty of a grove of tall trees). Advanced challenge: use the Path Blur filter in Photoshop to add movement in post-processing.

FOOD CHAIN (STORY)

Week 42: 14 Oct 2019

Illustrate the concept of the food chain in a photograph. Advanced challenge: how many different lifeforms in the same food chain can you get in one photograph?

SELECTIVE BLUR (TECHNICAL)

Week 43: 21 Oct 2019

If you have a lens baby or wide-aperture art lens, you will love this challenge! This technique is also easy if you have a tiny macro lens for your cellphone camera. If you don't have any of these lenses, fear not, you might have to more carefully choose an appropriate subject but it's still doable. Using a wide aperture, focus on only one small but important part of the subject, letting the rest fall off into blur. This technique works well for flowers: consider the form of the flower in question and see what first draws your eye - is it a curl of a petal, the curve of the stem, the pop of a stamen? Focus only on that. Think carefully about your composition and where that sweet spot of focus will fall. Hint: you can also use Photoshop or apps to selectively blur in post-processing. Advanced challenge: add a painterly texture.

CREEPY (CREATIVE)

Week 44: 28 Oct 2019

Just in time for Halloween, tell a creepy story. It could be about a creepy-crawly, or wherever your imagination takes you.

FOR A FRIEND (TECHNICAL)

Week 45: 04 Nov 2019

By now you will have some stunning photos, so let's do something with them that you can give as a gift and bring joy into someone's life. Ideas: design a calendar, print greeting cards, print and frame your favourite photos, make a blurb book, make a handbound book - the sky is the limit! You'll be surprised at the difference it makes getting your images off your computer and into the world.

MY HAPPY PLACE (STORY)

Week 46: 11 Nov 2019

Show us your happy place and make us happy too.

REFLECTIONS (CREATIVE)

Week 47: 18 Nov 2019

Double the impact with a reflection. Advanced challenge: show only the reflection in a creative way or add a fake reflection using Photoshop (or similar) and see if we can tell :)

ONE SHOT WONDER (TECHNICAL)

Week 48: 25 Nov 2019

You get one shot - so triple-check all your settings and think long and hard about your composition before pressing the shutter. It's so easy these days to pray and spray, hoping to get the perfect shot while consigning yourself to an afternoon of deleting a thousand identical photos.

STILL LIFE (CREATIVE)

Week 49: 02 Dec 2019

Arrange a still life scene and photograph it compellingly. Try to tell a visual story that links each element - though it doesn't have to be an obvious one. Don't be satisfied with your first photo, try different angles and settings and explore the scene. Advanced challenge: include memento mori to represent the transience of life and feel free to use Photoshop compositing and photo-artistry techniques to turn your still life into a work of art.

EXPOSURE BRACKETING (TECHNICAL)

Week 50: 09 Dec 2019

Do you get frustrated with photos that are either overblown in the highlights or have no details in the shadows? Extend the dynamic range of your photos by exposure bracketing to take multiple photos with different exposures, then combining them in-camera (if your camera does that) or externally in Lightroom or Photoshop either manually or by using the inbuilt features. Most cameras will have an exposure bracketing setting that will automatically take the set of photos at each exposure value. A tripod will also come in handy.

ON THE EDGE (STORY)

Week 51: 16 Dec 2019

Find a region where two ecosystems overlap and meet the locals (e.g., the littoral zone at the beach, an estuary, wetlands...)

PHOTO ESSAY (EVERYTHING)

Week 52: 23 Dec 2019

This is when we bring it all together. Think of the skills you've developed this year and create a photo essay of 5-10 photos, related by theme or topic, and use it to advocate for something you care about. Feel free to use photos you've taken this year or take new ones. Aim for a consistent look-and-feel across the photoset, while ensuring each picture contributes uniquely to the story. How to present your essay? Possibilities include designing an Adobe Spark presentation, Instagram story, YouTube slideshow with sound track. Make sure to tell the world about your essay through social media posts etc. Advanced challenge: arrange to print and exhibit your photo essay.

BONUS WEEK FOR PHOTO ESSAY (EVERYTHING)

Week 53, 2020: 30 Dec 2019