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Deer Photography Tips By Wildlife Photographer Kevin Keatley.



Most seasons of the year are good for deer photography but the one I look forward to and most photographers do is the autumn rut. For me it has a combination of the action of the stags, the stunning autumn colours and frosty mornings.

It's said that the best light for outdoor photography is the morning and evening light. Stags are active in the evening and at the height of the rut there is a lot of roaring during the evening and through the night. A photo of a stag against a sunset would be a magical photo, but as a photographer you are up against a fading light and reducing opportunities. For me, the early mornings are the best time. I get up before sunrise and head for the moor.

Exmoor is the closest spot to me for Red deer. It can be a wild and desolate place, open moor land is not good for creeping up on the deer, but it can be done.

When I reach the moor the sun is usually just coming up and as I'm driving out of the misty valleys there can be some stunning sunrises and an opportunity for a photo that can't be missed.



From the wind direction I've got to know where the Red deer would be and which sides of the valley to look. The moor is open and there are very few trees I can hide behind, but I've worked out my route and park up about a mile away in the next valley. I have about half hour walking up hill to the edge of the ridge. It's a bit of a shock getting out of the warm van but the walk soon warms me up.

Usually the deer are settled down for the night in the lee of the valley out of the wind. I plan it so I'm coming from the next valley and the wind is blowing towards me taking any scent away behind me. As the sun comes up the deer tend to drift off from their night spot and I try to get a perfect position behind some gorse or heather as they walk quietly past me stopping now and again to graze. If all goes to plan they are not aware of my presence and I can get some good close shots.



The bracken, heather and gorse on the moor is about half a metre high and I do crawl through this on occasions to get closer to the deer but there is usually one hind or stag looking around while the others graze so the crawling doesn't always go to plan.

When I'm on the moors I wear Realtree camouflage jacket, trousers, hat and gloves, this really helps you blend in to the background. My camera and tripod are also camouflaged. I have found this really helps me to get much closer and I can get some good shots even with a 300mm lens.

The New Forest in autumn is another favourite place of mine to photograph both Red deer and fallow deer. The technique is a bit different as the landscape is not so open. I usually stay over night in my camper van and head off on foot just before sunrise. I have an idea of my route and a few places I'm likely to find the deer. I've found that I don't need as much camouflage as I would on Exmoor, it's not so open and in the New Forest I tend to keep to the edge of the woods. I usually just wear a Realtree camouflage jacket, hat and gloves. I still use camera and lens cover and tripod cover to break up any straight edges, as long as your clothing is neutral/natural colours – greens, browns or even grey you will fit in. Deer are colour blind and only see in shades of grey. I have noticed that black or white does stand out over a long distance in the early morning light. Walkers or even other photographers wearing black or white are soon spotted by the deer. In recent years the New Forest has become a very popular place to watch and photograph the deer, but this has led to a lot of disturbance for the deer during the rut and the deer have become more secretive even straying onto private land where they could be shot. The New Forest does have protected areas for the deer and information boards for visitors.

I'm after true natural relaxed photos of the deer and by keeping to the edge of the woods, moving slowly and anticipating where the deer may be, I might get the shot I'm after. See my October update on my [blog](#) "A year in photography".





A lot of my photos I've taken of deer have some bracken or greenery in the foreground. I try to show the season and environment, but it's also

how I take my photos from the depth of the undergrowth looking out into the open. If I use my 500mm lens I don't extend the tripod above kneeling height – standing up makes you more visible to the deer and the human form and outline would soon spook them. Most of my deer photos are taken with a 300mm f4 IS lens, hand held. With this lens I can creep around more, hide behind trees and concentrate on my field craft to get closer to the deer. On a misty morning the closer you can get the sharper your photos will be.

I always look forward to the autumn rut – the misty sunrises, frosty mornings, autumn colours and the challenge of getting that perfect shot. I can highly recommend it.

I spend a lot of time on Exmoor, or in the New Forest but a good place to practice your technique is in a deer park. There are a number around the country that have public access. Get out there and give it a try – you will soon be hooked – I am.

Kevin Keatley.
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