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Capture the diversity of the UK's glorious coastline with our definitive guide to photographing coastal wildlife on land, in the sea and in the air

**IN-DEPTH  
FEATURE SPECIAL  
COASTAL WILDLIFE**  
**12-PAGE  
GUIDE**

There's a whole other world to explore beside the sea, filled with unique wildlife just waiting to be caught on camera

# GO WILD AT THE COAST

# Most of us, when shooting coastals, focus on the landscapes. But, wherever you live, there's plenty more action to be found if you know where to look...

**W**ith constantly shifting sands, exposed cliff faces, windswept landscapes and salty spray, the UK coastline may seem inhospitable to some. Yet many species of flora and fauna have adapted to survive in this often difficult environment.

The coast is an exciting and diverse location, with the shape of the land being constantly altered through the power of the surging tides, and with animals, birds and plants continually adapting to changes in their habitat. With such a variety of thriving wildlife set against a dramatic backdrop, it's no wonder that photographers are naturally attracted to the coastline.

Photographing at the coast can be very exciting and rewarding, but it's not without its challenges, as professional photographer, Allen Lloyd, explains: "The main problems are obviously sand and salt spray. In addition, it is vital to keep an eye on the tide at all times, so as never to compromise your safety." Fellow professional photographer, Janet Baxter, who resides on the West Wales coast, adds: "Coastal areas can be colder and windier than inland locations, so warm, windproof clothing can be essential. Suitable footwear is also important when scrambling over rocky shores or along cliffs. Binoculars can be useful to locate wildlife before it flies or runs away. A backpack which can keep out salt spray and sand will protect your camera equipment."

Any shoot requires some level of preparation, and photographing coastal wildlife is one activity in particular that it's essential to plan ahead for. Lloyd outlines his typical preparations: "Equipment-wise, all lenses are checked for absolute cleanliness, for the shoot. Digital sensors are also given a precautionary clean with a blower bulb. Tide times, weather forecasts, along with sunrise and sunset times are vitally important. In addition it is essential to know the aspect of the location, to know whether the visit needs to be made during morning or afternoon. I prefer to wear several layers, so that body temperature can be easily controlled and I find a compass, extremely useful to forecast where the sun will rise or set." Baxter adds: "Make sure batteries are charged, choose appropriate lenses. Plan a route and include maps if necessary. Check the weather forecast; satellite, radar and wind maps are useful to give the latest weather on the ground, and select clothing accordingly – bearing in mind forecasts have been known to get it wrong!"

In spite of the risks of accumulating dust and dirt on digital sensors, there are many advantages to shooting digitally in this genre of photography, as Lloyd outlines: "I now work entirely in the media of digital photography, using bodies including Canon EOS 1Ds Mark III and Canon EOS 1D Mark III bodies. This

gives me the opportunity to check the exposure immediately with the use of the histogram and enables me to compose the image in many different ways, without worrying about the cost of film." Baxter – who shoots with a Canon EOS 1D Mark III – adds: "[The benefit of shooting digitally is that] good-quality images can be taken at high ISO speeds; action rarely takes place in perfect weather or perfect lighting, especially in the UK. High speeds are also essential to freeze action when taking moving subjects such as dolphins and birds in flight from a moving boat. Exposure, which can be tricky on brightly lit water and on black-and-white birds, can also be checked in the field."

Every genre of photography has its hazards, and this type of photography is no different. The sorts of problems you can expect to encounter when out photographing wildlife at the coast vary, but many can be overcome with thorough planning, as Baxter explains: "[The most difficult thing is] being in the right place at the right time and finding it! Marine mammals and seabirds do not appear on cue, or they appear in places inaccessible to the photographer. Capturing action can be difficult too, so try practising your skills on moving subjects such as gulls in the harbour or dogs running on the beach or park. That way, you will be familiar with the camera controls." At home, try your hand at action shots, panning after birds flying through your garden or in

## 700 miles of the UK's coastline is managed by the National Trust

your local park. Photograph your domestic dog or cat, experimenting with different perspectives and lenses, until operating your camera equipment becomes second nature. The more practise you put in, the better prepared you'll be when you're out, and the more 'keepers' you'll go home with.

When it comes to finding the right location, there are several 'hot spots' that are extremely popular with photographers, particularly at this time of year, due to the abundance of wildlife that they support. According to Lloyd, ▶▶



**SEAL**  
Janet Baxter used a 400mm lens to get closer to this inquisitive seal, filling the frame with her subject and creating an eye-catching image  
**Shot details: Canon EOS 10D with 100-400mm L IS lens at 400mm and f8, 1/250sec, ISO 400**

**BOW RIDING**  
Baxter has introduced some movement into this shot, slowing down her shutter speed and panning  
**Shot details: Canon EOS 1D Mark II N with 28-300mm L IS lens at 65mm and f28, 1/15sec, ISO 200**

"Pups may look cuddly, but they have sharp teeth and the consequences of a seal bite can be very unpleasant to say the least"



**EXPERT ADVICE**

**JANET BAXTER**

**Web:** [www.cymriccards.co.uk](http://www.cymriccards.co.uk)  
Professional photographer Janet Baxter has been in the business for 25 years, having built up her own career from scratch: "I started part-time, publishing my own postcards and greetings cards from my photos, and it took ten years to develop a business working full-time with photography. Now, in addition to producing postcards and greetings cards, Baxter has "an extensive stock library covering UK marine mammals and birds". She also belongs to a local marine environmental monitoring group, and helps to raise awareness of marine wildlife with the general public.

**1 CHECK THE TIDES**

You can buy tide tables for the area you are visiting, or go online at [www.bbc.co.uk/weather/coast/tides](http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/coast/tides). In summer, always check if times are corrected for BST. The BBC, for example, gives GMT times.

**2 BE CAREFUL AROUND STEEP CLIFFS**

It's easy to step off the edge when looking through the viewfinder! Also, remember you don't have to go far to lose mobile reception.

**3 DON'T DISTURB NESTING/BREEDING BIRDS**

In the case of rare schedule one birds, eg peregrine falcons, it's illegal to photograph them at their nest without a licence. Remember, you don't always need to get close to get that striking picture.

**4 DO NOT APPROACH SEALS ON THE BEACH**

Pups may look cuddly but they have sharp teeth, and the consequences of a seal bite can be very unpleasant to say the least due to the bacteria they carry.

**5 AT SEA, USE LICENSED COMMERCIAL BOAT OPERATORS**

If you're on a private boat when approaching marine mammals and seals, follow any marine codes for the area. Also remember it's an offence to cause deliberate or reckless disturbance to animals such as dolphins under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.



© Allen Lloyd

**PUFFIN**  
Allen Lloyd photographed this puffin with fish on Skomer Island, Pembrokeshire. Including the whole of the bird's body, along with some of its environment in the background, creates an endearing and informative portrait  
**Shot details:** Canon EOS 1Ds Mark II with 70-200mm IS f2.8 lens at 97mm and f10, 1/320sec, ISO 160



“If you’re shooting with a telephoto lens and it’s not possible or indeed safe to get any closer to your subject, you’ll have to work with whatever natural light you have available”

▶▶ the most inspiring location that he’s come across so far is the Falkland Islands: “Here, the wildlife is abundant and has no fear of humans. I cannot describe the feeling of sitting close to albatross birds or having penguins walk up to you, out of sheer curiosity.” Closer to home, he continues: “My favourite locations in the UK have to be the Farne Islands in Northumberland and Skomer Island in Pembrokeshire. In both places you will enjoy close encounters with seabirds, such as puffins.” Baxter agrees: “The Farne Islands and Pembrokeshire Islands [are best] for puffins (Skomer). The island of Grassholm is excellent for gannets – there’s no landing, but boat trips run from St David’s to go round the Island. Cardigan Bay and the Moray Firth are good for bottlenose dolphins and seals – both shore-watching and wildlife boat trips. Common dolphins, seals, porpoise and whales may be encountered on wildlife boat trips from St. David’s also.”

The National Trust’s website, [www.nationaltrust.org.uk](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk), is a good starting point if you’re looking for a suitable destination in your locality. The National Trust manages over 700 miles of the UK’s coastline, so the organisation has plenty to offer the budding coastal photographer, with beautiful walks, wildlife reserves and conservation schemes that you can get involved with. The BBC’s Science and Nature pages on their website ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)) are also a great source of information, with helpful guides to four of the most abundant coastal wildlife hot spots in the UK.

Once you’ve picked your location and have found your subject, there are yet more factors to take into consideration – not least the lighting. Lloyd tries to work during the first and last hours of daylight wherever possible, but if you can’t make it to your location during these periods and your subject’s not a million miles away, he recommends bringing out your flash gun:



© Janet Baxter

“Photographs are frequently taken outside these periods of attractive soft lighting, which often leads to harsh conditions with bright highlights and deep shadows. Under these conditions, flash is invaluable. Its purpose is not simply to produce a catch-light, but to actually lighten the shadow areas. For this reason, I usually start by adjusting the flash output until it is one stop below that of the main exposure. At this point, a test shot is taken and the preview screen is used to evaluate and possibly change the exposure. The important point is to lighten but not to remove the shadow.” ▶▶

▶ **GANNET**  
Keeping some detail in the background tells us more about this Gannet’s environment, while isolating just one of the flock  
**Shot details:** Canon EOS 1D Mark II N with 100-400mm L IS lens at 350mm and f8, 1/2700sec, ISO 500

## GearGuide Everything you need to get you going with coastal photography



**B+W UV MRC FILTER**  
PRICE: £50  
CONTACT: 0870 444 6562  
WEB: [www.schneiderkreuznach.com](http://www.schneiderkreuznach.com)

A UV filter is a valuable protective device that prevents the front element of your lens from damage. In an environment where sand and salty spray from the sea are both risks, it pays to invest in one of these.



**LINPIX PHOTOGRAPHIC MAT**  
PRICE: £17  
CONTACT: 01420 560066  
WEB: [www.speedgraphic.co.uk](http://www.speedgraphic.co.uk)

Photographing various species of flora and fauna often results in having to lie on the ground, resulting in a wet/muddy/sandy photographer. This mat is a lightweight, waterproof solution that folds down small and can be hooked onto your camera bag when not in use.



**NIKON D300**  
PRICE: £1300  
CONTACT: 0871 200 1964  
WEB: [www.nikon.co.uk](http://www.nikon.co.uk)

This much-revered DSLR offers enthusiasts and professional photographers alike an award-winning combination of comfort, speed, great handling and superb image quality. It’s smaller and lighter than the high-end heavyweights, making it ideal for a long day out in the field.



**SIGMA 150-500MM F5-6.3 DG OS HSM**  
PRICE: £800  
CONTACT: 01707 329 999  
WEB: [www.sigma-imaging-uk.com](http://www.sigma-imaging-uk.com)

This new launch from Sigma covers a wide focal range for added versatility, while the built-in Optical Stabiliser (OS) helps to keep your shots sharp. Renowned for the quality of their optics, Sigma has incorporated a number of technologies into this lens to ensure superb image quality.

# “Shooting with a DSLR enables me to compose the image in many different ways, without worrying about the cost”

▶ It can also be interesting to try photographing creatures in motion using rear curtain sync flash. Try photographing a bird as it's taking off using this method and you'll end up with a dynamic shot, with the movement of the bird recorded as well as a sharp image of the creature when the flash fires.

Of course, if you're shooting with a telephoto lens and it's not possible or indeed safe to get any closer to your subject, you'll have to work with whatever natural light you have available. Baxter shares a few tips to help you make the most of it: “If photographing from a boat, there is very little you can do in terms of controlling direction of light on your subject. Generally, most seabirds are black and white or all white and photograph better in soft lighting, ie hazy sun or light cloud cover. On land there is more control and you can plan to have the sun in the right direction. In the case of cliffs in deep shade, photography on cloudy days reduces the contrast between areas of shade and light. Silhouettes can be dramatic with backlit feather detail, or water droplets too.”

If you want to maximise the potential of the available light, ideally you'll need a fast lens – that is, a lens with a large maximum aperture. A lens with a maximum aperture of f1.2-2.8 will have a greater light-gathering ability than a lens with a maximum aperture of f5.6-6.3, and the former will allow you to shoot at faster shutter speeds in low light than the latter. Another way to keep your shutter speeds up as the light dims is to boost your ISO, although with most DSLRs, noise begins to creep in upwards of about ISO 400-800. How usable your high ISO shots will be depends on your individual camera's performance, although more recent models are capable of delivering very good results, and there's always the option of cleaning up some images using noise-reduction software.

Composition is another key factor to take into consideration and, although there are some guidelines you can follow – not



**PUFFIN IN FLIGHT ▶**  
Allen Lloyd photographed this puffin returning to its nest with sandeels in the Farne Islands, Northumberland  
**Shot details:** Canon EOS 1D Mark II with 300mm IS f4 lens and 1.4x converter at 420mm and f14, 1/800sec, ISO 500

least the rule of thirds – there's plenty of room for creative license. As far as Lloyd's concerned: “The most important thing to achieve in a picture is to give some information about the behaviour of the creature or about its environment. Most people will find a straightforward portrait less interesting.” Baxter expands on this point, adding: “In the case of whales and dolphins, getting it in the frame and out of the water is a good start! Conventional rules of composition can be followed with more static subjects such as some birds, seals and when photographing creatures in rock pools. Look out for reflections on calm days and always try different viewpoints: don't shoot everything from human eye level. It isn't always necessary to get close to your subject to take a striking image: putting the wildlife in its setting can tell a story. For example, a photo of rows of seabirds on the cliffs can say more than a close-up of an individual.”

Experiment with orientation while you're shooting, too. If you open a folder of images you've shot next time you're on the computer, take a look at the thumbnails – is there a good mix of vertical and horizontal compositions? Most of us feel more comfortable shooting horizontally, and we often forget to try turning the camera on its end. However, doing so can often produce more dynamic and interesting compositions, so it's worth giving it a try.

The equipment and technique that you use is, of course, dependent upon the subject you're photographing. The UK coastline is home to a huge range of creatures on the land, in the water and in the sky, so it's worth doing some research before travelling to your destination to find out which species are likely to make an appearance. Going out in a boat is a great way to get closer to sea life, and little can compare to the experience of riding the waves alongside a pool of dolphins or whales. Baxter – an expert when it comes to photographing these elegant and beautiful creatures – offers some valuable advice: “When photographing whales and dolphins, use a fast shutter speed and try to anticipate where the animal will appear. Image-stabilised lenses are useful on a boat when shooting moving subjects from a moving platform. You might also try using a slow shutter speed to create the impression of movement of animals bow riding alongside the boat.”

Seals also make fantastically photogenic subjects, whether bobbing in the water or resting on land. They may look like endearing creatures, but they can also be unpredictable. For this reason, it's worth learning a bit about seal 'language' to help you interpret their behaviour and avoid a potentially dangerous situation.

First and foremost, you should never approach a seal with young – if they see you as a threat, the parent will defend their pups. Watch out for adults hissing or barking at you, and don't underestimate how quickly they can move! For the sake of the safety of both you and the animals you're photographing, Lloyd advises: “It is vital to respect wildlife and never make any move towards a creature that would cause it stress.” Baxter adds: “If photographing seals from the land, keep below the skyline and avoid sudden movements.” She continues: “On land I use a telephoto lens to avoid ▶▶

## GENTOO PENGUIN

Allen Lloyd captured this gentoo penguin, drinking sea water on Sealion Island, Falkland Islands, under the warm evening light

**Shot details:** Canon EOS 1Ds Mark III with 400mm IS f4 lens and x1.4 converter, at 420mm and f11, 1/500sec, ISO 400



## ALBERTROSS ▶▶

Allen Lloyd photographed these black-browed albatross displaying courtship behaviour on Saunders Island, in the Falkland Islands

**Shot details:** Canon EOS 1Ds Mark III with 300mm IS f4 lens at 300mm and f11, 1/400sec, ISO 250



## GANNET ▶▶

Allen Lloyd photographed this gannet diving for fish from a boat in Firth of Forth Estuary, Scotland. A slower shutter speed and a panning technique allowed Lloyd to introduce some movement into the shot, while keeping the subject sharp

**Shot details:** Canon EOS 1Ds Mark II with 70-200mm IS f2.8 lens at 160mm and f16, 1/640sec, ISO 800



“I still spend a great deal of my time visiting camera clubs to give lectures”



## EXPERT ADVICE

### ALLEN LLOYD

**Web:** www.allenlloyd.co.uk  
Allen Lloyd has worked as a professional photographer for the past three years, since taking early retirement from the world of education. He explains: “I spend most of my photographic time in

the world of landscape and the natural world, in addition to spending time carrying out workshops in outdoor photography and digital manipulation. All workshops are mainly one-to-one or one-to-two and can be booked through my website.

I have been involved in photography for more than 40 years, as a member of several camera clubs. During this time I have been a very successful exhibitor in both National and International Photographic Salons. I still spend a great deal of my time visiting camera clubs to give lectures.”

Lloyd is an expert on wild birds but also enjoys photographing other wildlife, as well as landscapes and steam railways, shooting with his Canon 1Ds Mk III and Canon 1D Mk III.

#### 1 WEAR APPROPRIATE CLOTHING

Outdoor clothing should be both waterproof and windproof, as well as of colours that will blend in with your surroundings. I prefer to wear several layers, so that body temperature can be controlled.

#### 2 USE A TRIPOD

Use a spirit level or look through the viewfinder to check horizons to make sure that they are level.

#### 3 CHECK TIDE TIMES

Be aware of the time, what the tide's doing and be vigilant.

#### 4 PROTECT YOUR KIT

Use protection against sea spray on lenses and on camera bodies.

#### 5 CHECK YOUR EXPOSURE

Look at your shots on the LCD as you go along to make use of your histogram!



© Janet Baxter

“Research the market to find out what is in demand, or if there are any gaps. Try and specialise in a subject, a different angle or approach and develop your own distinctive style”



© Janet Baxter

◀ **GREY SEAL GRASSHOLM**

Baxter photographed this inquisitive grey seal off the coast of Grassholm, Pembrokeshire, using a fast shutter speed to freeze the action of the waves

**Shot details:** Canon EOS 1D Mark II, 100-400mm L IS, 400mm, f8, 1/1000sec, ISO 400

**BAR-TAILED GODWITS** ▲

Baxter proves that you don't always need to zoom in close to your subject with a dynamic shot of these bar-tailed godwits, photographed on the Dyfi estuary during the spring migration

**Shot details:** Canon EOS 30D with 100-400mm L IS lens at 400mm, f8, 1/2500sec, ISO 500

## Sea Trust

Sea Trust was formed in 2003 as a marine arm of the Wildlife Trust S&W Wales. Dolphins, porpoises, whales, seals, sharks, jellyfish, turtles and plankton are surveyed, monitored and recorded by Sea Trust, an organisation that is about local people taking care of their own marine environment.

The Trust builds on local knowledge, raising awareness and enhancing skills that will help to protect and conserve marine inheritance for future generations. Its surveys cover most of the south and west Wales - to date over 300 supporters and volunteers have actively taken part in its work.

If you want to get involved with surveys in your local area, visit [www.seatrust.co.uk](http://www.seatrust.co.uk) for more details. Sea Trust also runs wildlife cruises, photographic holidays and 'Dolphin Days', further details of which can be found on the website. Taking part in such activities will not only present prime opportunities to photograph coastal wildlife, but you'll learn more about your local marine environment and how best to protect it.

Cliff Benson, director, Sea Trust S&W Wales; [www.seatrust.org.uk](http://www.seatrust.org.uk) is a section of the Wildlife Trust S&W Wales. Sea Trust's work is supported by Stena Line, Environment Wales and CCW. Sea Trust is also represented on the Welsh Assembly Governments Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group.



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▶▶ disturbing the wildlife and the need to go too near cliff edges. When approaching animals and birds, I walk slowly and constantly watch for any signs of movement suggesting distress. I also am aware of tide times and heights. At sea I use commercial licensed boat operators who are experienced in approaching wildlife to get the best views, while observing the law and local marine codes set out to minimise disturbance.”

Photographing static animals and birds can be tricky enough, but once they start moving, things get even more complicated. The main thing you need to pay attention to in this situation is your shutter speed: low light levels and an inability to use flash means you're in danger of generating camera shake. Try shooting in Shutter Priority mode, with your shutter speed set to around 1/500sec or faster. If your shots are still underexposed or there's unwanted blur, boost your ISO accordingly until you're getting the results you want. If you want to experiment with introducing some movement into your shot, slowing your shutter speed to around 1/125sec just under (depending on the conditions) and panning after your subject should produce a pleasantly blurred background, with your subject in sharp focus.

As we've already mentioned, the advantages of shooting digitally make it easier for the photographer to experiment and produce more creative compositions that are potentially saleable.

If you're looking to sell your images, Lloyd advises: “Ensure that images are technically perfect, ie sharp and well exposed. Make the most of special lighting conditions and make sure that images are well composed. Try and develop a distinctive style and [always] strive for perfection.” When trying to break into the wildlife photo market, Baxter suggests: “Research the market to find out what is in demand or if there are any gaps. Try and specialise in a subject, a different angle or approach and develop your own distinctive style. Don't forget to turn your camera

**1/500 sec – try shooting in Shutter Priority mode to avoid camera shake**

round to shoot portrait format as well as landscape.” When first trying to make money from your photos, Baxter advocates: “[There's the] usual route of magazines and local exhibitions. Try approaching picture agencies, calendar, postcard and greetings card companies. Write articles to accompany your photos. Start off by seeing if you can get your photos or photo features published in local papers or magazines. They may not pay much, if at all, but it will raise your profile.”

In the UK, we're fortunate to have some of the most beautiful stretches of coastline in the world: take your camera on a trip to the coast and you should be able to find an abundance of enthralling subjects, whatever the weather. Just remember: a little planning goes a long way, so heed the advice of our experts, add a little of your own creative flair, and you could be on your way to making a bit of money from your day at the seaside too. Whichever coastal spot you choose, you should always remember to respect the wildlife you're photographing. No shot is worth causing distress or harm to an animal, or indeed to yourself. Prepare for the worst, look out for unexpected opportunities and – above all – enjoy yourself. Take pride in showing off your shots, too: the more people that become enthused about our coastal habitats, the greater chance we have of preserving them. ▶▶