Steve Ingraham's Easy Birds and Wildlife with the OM-Systems OM-1 (and OM-1 Mk ii)

Chapter one: Basic Intro and the Program mode choice.

(It might be best to read at least chapters one through eight of Steve Ingraham's Easy Birds and Wildlife with the OM Systems OM-1 through at least once, so you have a better idea of what you are getting into, before you start to make any changes to your OM-1 settings. It will all make more sense that way, and might save you time in the long run. Also, with the recent release of the OM-1 Mk ii I have updated the sections where there are significant changes…mostly in the Auto Focus section.)

This is the basic introduction to Steve Ingraham's Easy Birds and Wildlife with the OM-Systems OM-1. Here I will cover the method itself, and the program mode choice, as well as some first modifications to program mode that will get you started in your Easy Birds and Wildlife with the OM-1.

Bird and Wildlife photography does not have to difficult. A camera like the OM-1, or now the OM-1 Mk ii, has such sophisticated automation that it is possible to let the camera take care of the technical side of the photography…from exposure to white balance, to focus and jpeg processing… leaving you, the photographer, free to do what only a human mind and a human heart..what only human eyes can do…to see and frame the wonders of the natural world. Set the camera up to produce well exposed, well focused jpeg images in the widest variety of situations, with the widest variety of subjects, and with the least amount of effort on your part, and then let the camera do its job, while you do yours.

Why the OM-1? I use it because of its lower cost, relatively light weight, and compact design compared to other high end mirrorless and DSLR options out there today…and for its class leading focus and exposure automation. Subject detection, with eye-tracking auto focus, is a huge benefit for the bird and wildlife photographer. And the OM-System includes several lenses that are ideal for bird and wildlife photography. The one I use is the ED 100-400mm IS zoom, with the equivalent field of view of a 200 to 800mm lens on a full frame DSLR. 800mm is enough to fill a significant portion of the frame with most wildlife, and many birds at a reasonable distance. Weighs less, costs less, great lenses, great image quality, the OM-1 is, to me, the obvious choice. The recently released OM-1 Mk ii is almost identical to the original OM-1 in most ways that matter to Bird and Wildlife photographers. Image stabilization is slightly improved, even with non-pro series lenses like the ED 100-400mm IS zoom, and the bird and wildlife subject detection and eye-tracking auto focus has been reworked to be more eye-centric and less dependent on the selected target area. I will cover the changes, where needed, in the following sections.

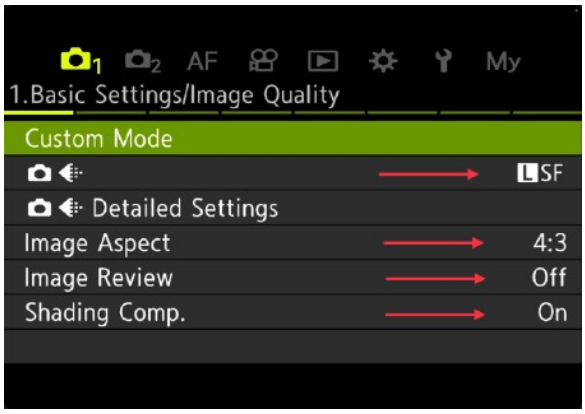
I shoot jpeg images in program mode, using three basic sets of modifications…one for stationary or slowly moving birds, one for birds in flight and active wildlife, and one for larger wildlife. (The bird and wildlife modifications are almost identical, with the exception of the subject detection setting.)

Why Program mode? The OM Systems OM-1, unlike most modern digital cameras, does not have an Auto mode and even if it did I would not be using it for birds and wildlife. Program is actually “Programed Auto Mode”, The difference between true Auto and Program modes on most cameras is that in Auto, the camera decides what you are trying to focus on and where your exposure should be based, as well as the balance between the three factors that make up exposure. In Program, you can control, or modify, where the camera focuses, where exposures are taken, and how the basic exposure parameters are balanced. With the OM-1 (and most other digital cameras… but the OM-1 is really good at it) you can also control how the jpeg images are processed in the camera, so that you get the most consistent and pleasing results right out of the camera, without a lot of post processing.

Why jpeg? More properly and to the point, with today’s modern cameras, why not jpeg? With the sophisticated jpeg engine in the OM-1, you can set the camera to make most, if not all, of the adjustments in camera that you would have to do in post processing if you were shooting RAW…and it will do them at least as well you could after the fact, and often better. That means more consistently satisfying images. You are going to end up with a jpeg anyway, if you use the image in any format for any purpose. If the camera can do it for you, why not let it?

Then too, many of the most powerful and useful features of the camera are only available when shooting JPEGs.

With that in mind, the first modifications we are going to make for the Easy Birds and Wildlife with the OM-1 is to set the camera to Program (the P on the main control dial), and the Image Quality setting to Large Super Fine Jpeg. Note that you can set Image Quality for each of the two card slots of the OM-1. We already discussed why jpeg, but using the least compression will increase the quality of your images, and only cost you a bit of memory space on your card. Memory is cheap these days.



While we are at it we will set the Aspect ratio to 4:3. 4:3 uses all the pixels of the sensor. The only time you might want to change this setting is if you are shooting stills to include in a video, for which 16:9 might be better, or images to upload to Instagram, etc. when 1:1 might do better…but of course you can crop your 4:3 images to whatever you want in post processing.

And while we are still on the first page of the camera menu, we will set “Shading Comp” to ON. When shooting jpeg, this will remove the shadowed edges or center hot spot common with many lenses for digital cameras. This is an example of a step you would have to do manually if shooting RAW.

In the next Chapter we will begin to adjust the exposure automation for more consistent results when shooting birds and wildlife using the OM-1 for Easy Birds and Wildlife.

Chapter Two: Easy Birds and Wildlife with the OM Systems OM-1: Exposure modifications

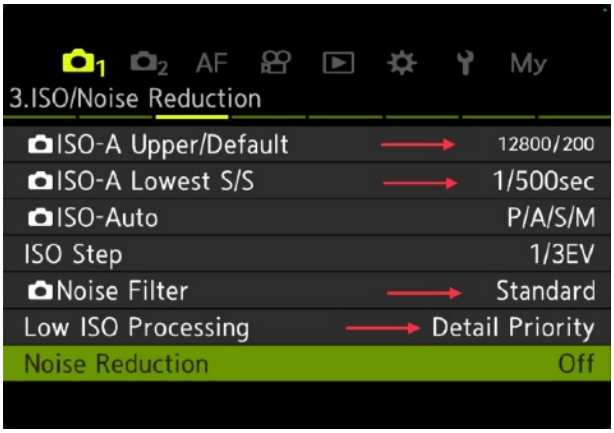
The exposure systems in today’s digital cameras are amazingly accurate and so simple to use. The sophisticated computing power of the camera’s exposure engine makes easy work of balancing the three factors of exposure: ISO, or sensitivity, aperture, or the amount of light entering through the lens, and shutter speed, how long the light is on the sensor. We only need to make a few modifications to program mode to give us the most consistent results for birds and wildlife.

These modifications begin on Camera Menu Page 3 with the ISO settings. ISO, as mentioned, is a measure of how sensitive the sensor is to light. In a digital camera, the camera or the photographer adjusts the sensitivity to produce exposures with the correct balance of shadows and highlights, minimum

sensor noise, and the most correct color rendition. It is like turning up or down the brightness of a computer or tablet screen, only the sensitivity has to be turned up in low light, and down in bright light. As the sensitivity increases, so does the sensor noise, which results in increasing loss of detail in the image. Also as the sensitivity increases, the dynamic range, the range from deepest shadow to brightest highlight, becomes more and more compressed, and the color rendition becomes more uncertain. Therefore you get the best images at the lowest ISO settings.

Programed Auto is already programed to give you the lowest possible ISO in the given light conditions, as well as the largest aperture (where modern lenses for digital cameras are designed to be their sharpest) and the fastest shutter speed (to cut down the loss of detail due to camera or subject movement).

While there is only one correct exposure for any given light level, subject, and background, you do have some control over how the camera makes it's settings.



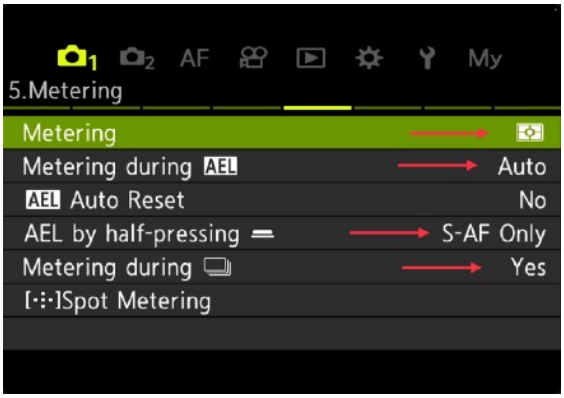
On the OM-1 you can set the upper and lower limits of ISO. (Again Page 3 of the Camera menus). The lower limit should always be ISO 200, as that is the "base" ISO of the camera and where the sensor produces the best image with the highest dynamic range, least noise, and most accurate colors. (On older digital cameras the base level was ISO 100…don't be convinced by anyone to use ISO 100 on the OM-1…it will result in lower image quality…not higher.) The OM-1 will produce usable images up to ISO 12800 (and higher in an emergency), but I set the upper limit to 12800. That is enough sensitivity for some surprisingly low light situations. (If shooting at night or close to dawn or dusk I will set the upper limit even higher, to ISO 32,000 or above.)

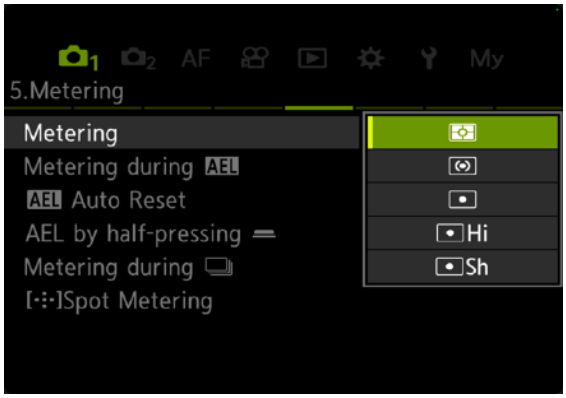
Also on Camera menu page 3, I set the lowest shutter speed I am willing to work with. With the ED 100-400mm zoom and its Image Stabilization, coupled with the in-body stabilization of the OM-1, I set this to 1/500th for stationary and slowly moving subjects (my bird and wildlife modifications to program, or my Custom 1 and 3 modes). I set it to 1/1600th for my Birds in fight modifications (Custom mode 2). Over the time I have owned the camera my lowest shutter speed setting as decreased from 1/800th to 1/640, and now all the way down to 1/500th as I have learned that the combined image stabilization of the OM-1 body and the ED 100-400mm zoom make hand holding images at these speeds practical. I only really have it set at 1/500th to guard against blur from subject motion. (And the IS on the Mkii is even better.)

To deal with the noise introduced by higher ISO settings, digital cameras have noise filters built into the jpeg engines…the algorithms that transform the raw data from the sensor to a usable image file. Noise filtration is another step that you would do in RAW conversion, that the camera does for you when you shoot jpeg…however, even the best noise filtration also removes some of the finest detail, so it must be applied carefully. You can control the level of noise filtration. I use Standard.

By the same token, Noise filtration can concentrate on removing as much noise as possible, or on preserving as much detail. I set the OM-1 to Detail Priority.

Noise reduction is a different function and is only used in chases where the sensor begins to overheat…as, possibly when shooting video or a very long sequence of exposures. Best to leave it on Auto and hope you never need it.

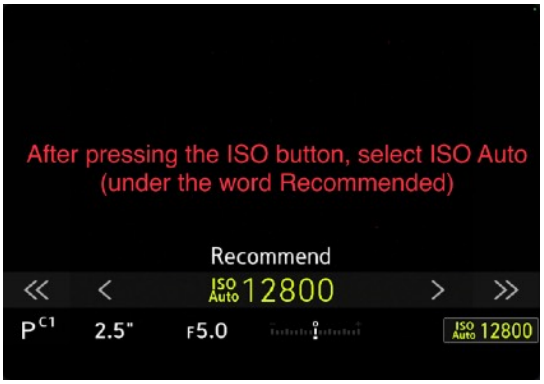




While we are working on exposure, on Page 5 of the Camera menus, we will set the area that the camera uses to determine exposure. The OM-1 has an ESP exposure program that reads the whole sensor, determines the probable subject, and exposes for it. It also makes some allowance for back-lighted subjects. All in all it is very effective and I see no reason not to use it for most shots of birds and wildlife. Again, if the camera can do it, let it do it.

On this page I also set the camera to meter during continuous (or sequential) shooting. This means that as I am following a bird or beastie, and holding the shutter button down to shoot a sequence, the camera will meter between each shot, so that if the light changes as the subject moves, I will still get correctly exposed images. Then I set AEL by half press (that is auto exposure lock) to only on S-AF, which also tells the camera to continue to meter when shooting continuous or sequential just in case the light changes dramatically during the sequence.

Finally, exiting all menus and returning to program mode I set the ISO to Auto. To do this press the ISO button on the back of the camera. In the scale that comes up at the bottom of the screen, make sure that ISO Auto is selected. It should have the word Recommended above it. The actual number attached will change with changing light,



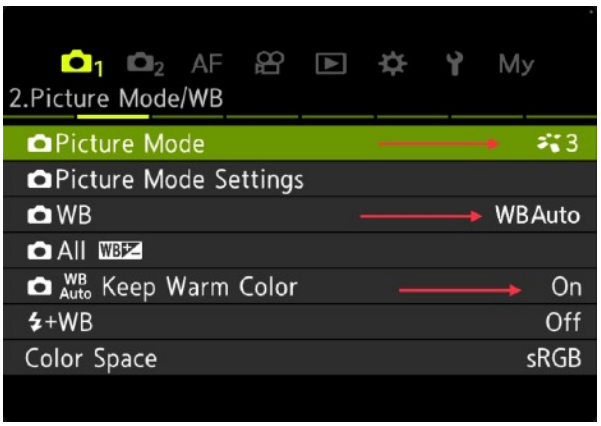
but the ISO Auto and Recommended will remain. (The word Recommended is also over the ISO 200 setting. You do not what that one.)

These modifications, when combined with the next set of modifications to how the jpeg is processed in the camera, will go a long way toward producing the consistently well exposed images of birds and wildlife that you are after.

The next chapter will cover those modifications to the jpeg processing engine.

Chapter 3. Easy Birds and Wildlife with the OM Systems OM-1: Jpeg engine modifications.

The basic modification profiles for the jpeg engine are called Picture Modes and they are on camera menu page 2.



For most birds and wildlife, I set Picture Mode (camera menu page 2) to #3 Natural. This profile attempts to produce an image with the most natural shadow and highlight details and the most correct and natural colors. I also set Gradation in the Natural profile (the bottom icon on the left) to Auto (also called Shadow Adjust), which applies a bit of processing magic to further enhance the shadow highlight balance. I find that Natural does a slightly better job under a wide variety of lighting situations, but you might also want to try the i-Enhance Picture Mode. If I had to contrast them I would say that iEnhance works toward an image with the most impact, while Natural works toward an image that is more neutral in its presentation. Most images shot in Natural will require just a bit more post processing than most images shot in i-Enhance, but

Natural will preserve more detail in the highlights. If you use i-Enhance, set Gradation to Auto.

This whole Picture Mode function is a bit strange in that pressing the center button on the 5 way control while choosing the profile or setting Gradation will boot you right back out of the menu system altogether without changing your settings. Highlight your Picture Mode choices by scrolling left and right with the 5 way control wheel, or use the front control wheel, and then the up and down and left right arrows on the 5 way control to highlight choices on the left under the Picture Mode, including Gradation, and then when all choices are highlighted, use the menu button to return to the main menu and lock in your settings. Once more, do not use the center button on the 5 way control. I had assumed this was a programming issue and might have been fixed in future firmware, but it is the same on the Mk ii so I guess that is the way they want it to work).

Picture Modes give you a great deal of control over how your jpegs are processed in the camera…these settings go a long way toward making RAW unnecessary. The four most useful settings are probably i-Enhance, if you trust the camera to do the necessary for your images…Vivid, if you like the punched up look for your work… Natural, if you want to control more in post processing…and Muted, if you want an image that is as close to RAW as possible while remaining a jpeg…in other words if you plan to do a lot of your own work in post processing. Then too, each of these Picture Modes can be adjusted for Saturation, Sharpness, and Contrast using the controls along the left side of the setting page. If you like to tinker, it is possible to develop a setting that will do 90% of your post processing right in the camera. You can even save those settings, based on one of the standard modes, to a custom mode of your own. Me? I just use Natural with Auto gradation and plus on Sharpening…always the easy way for me!

I also modify sharpening options of the Natural mode (see illustration above). Adjusting the Picture Mode sharpening will apply OM System's AI sharpening to the raw file data, as the JPEG is being converted, and seems to be more effective than trying to sharpen the JPEG after the fact. I tried both +1 and +2 and like the results from +1 better.

On the same menu page (see above) I use Auto White Balance as the OM-1 seems to do an excellent job with color temperature under a variety of lighting conditions.

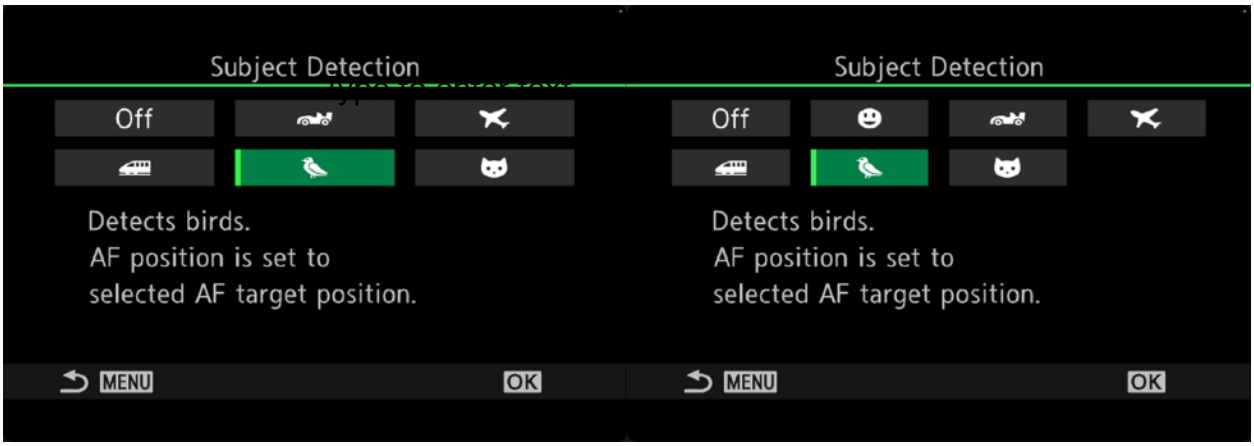
I prefer to set Keep Warm Color to ON so that when shooting in the golden hours (the hours before and after sunrise and sunset) the natural warm hue of the light is maintained.

The OM-1 has a tendency to favor shadow detail over highlight detail, even with these adjustments. (Though it is not among the advertised features of the Mkii, my impression is that the Natural profile does a better job of preserving highlights than it does in the original OM-1.) You can modify the metering settings (on Camera Menu page or the processing settings with the OM Systems “highlight/shadow” control, but in the end I find that Natural works best under the widest range of conditions. I do pay attention to bright whites...whether bird feathers, fur…or simply highlights reflecting back full sun…and use the Exposure Compensation wheel…the one on the front of the camera, to reduce exposure by - 0.7 or - 1.0 EV when I see a potential problem, but in many cases I still prefer the straight Natural version.

For those who want to experiment with Shadow/Highlight control, there is a chapter at the end on this feature.

Next we will examine the modifications to the Auto Focus systems that will lead to the most success with the OM-1 with birds and wildlife.

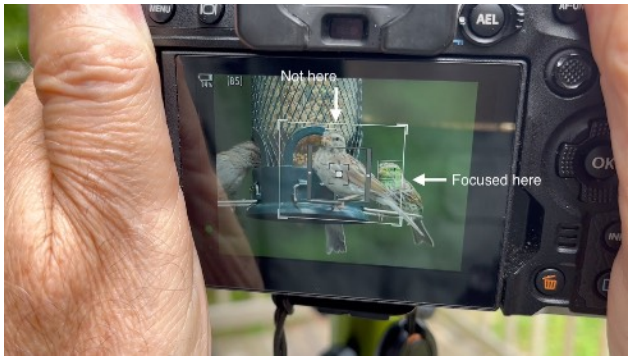
Chapter 4: Easy Birds and Wildlife with the OM Systems OM-1: Auto Focus.



The key feature of the OM-1 that makes it such a great camera for Easy bird and wildlife photography is, of course, the subject detection, eye-tracking auto focus. The OM-1 will auto detect birds, dogs and cats and wildlife of all sorts, and even cars, trains, and planes. (Human detection and eye-tracking is a separate feature in the OM-1 called Face Recognition. In the Mkii it has been added to the subject detection panel, see above). And whichever detection you have it set to, it works amazingly well. When set to birds it will detect and highlight (put a white box around) any bird in the frame. It also works well for butterflies, dragon and damselflies, other insects, reptiles

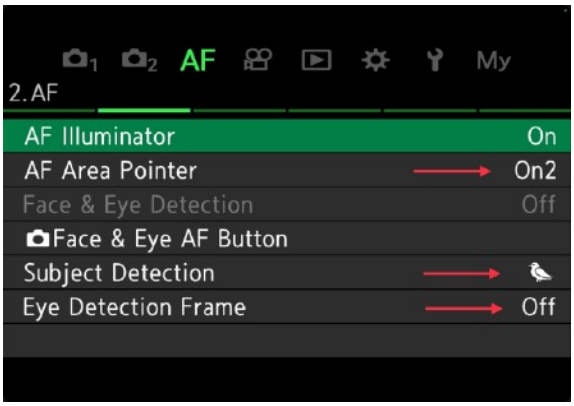
and amphibians, and small mammals. In dog and cat mode it will detect most larger wildlife (but not birds)! More than that, if possible, it will also find and highlight the eye of the subject. And it will track the subject, and its eye, as it moves in the frame or as you move the camera to reframe. In an ideal world it would also focus on the eye of the subject…but it is not quite that simple.

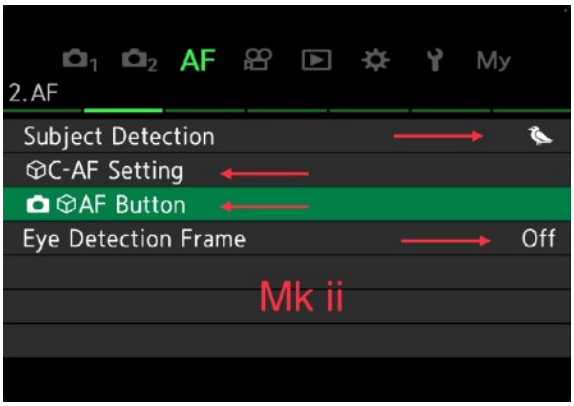
As it turns out, it will only focus on the eye if the white subject detection frame intersects or at least touches the grey outline of the selected focus target area…there are various focus target areas from the whole sensor (All) to a single spot…and you can move the smaller focus targets, anything less than All, around on the sensor. I suppose they might have done this to allow the photographer to choose between multiple birds or beasties in the same frame…but in reality it is just seems overly complicated. (And, as mentioned below, the Mkii takes a different approach to the problem.) I mean if you have auto focus set for bird detection, then the camera could assume, you would think, that you want it to focus on the bird. As it is, the camera may have detected and outlined a bird, even highlighted the eye, but it may or may not focus on the bird, depending on where the focus target area is at the time. This might be something OM Systems might like to refine in future firmware updates. (It has, in fact, been refined in the OM-1 Mk ii, see below, and a firmware update for the OM-1 is expected in the fall of 2024



which should help.)

In the end the only indicators that matter are the green ones…which tell you where the camera is actually going to focus. I have learned to pay close attention to where the green focus points appear when I have the shutter button half-pressed, and, given the chance, I wait until it is over the eye before I press the shutter. Tracking will take care of it from there…but if you start tracking with the actual focus point somewhere else in the frame it is not going to do you any good.





It is simple enough to set the subject detection to your chosen subject on Camera Menu Page 2 AF. Use Birds for anything but larger wildlife. Do not try to shoot birds while in Animal detection. It does not work. On the OM-1 I also set the AF Area Pointer to On2. This will show the Focus Points where the camera is focused. I set Eye Detection Frame to Off to reduce clutter in the view, and to lighten the processing load on the processor. On the Mkii you can set whether eye-tracking happens over the whole sensor or just within the current target area and whether subject or target area is preferred when using the shutter button and AF-On buttons (see below under the discussion of Auto Focus on the Mkii). Simple.

Dealing with the Auto focus target area is another thing altogether.

There are a couple of different ways to access the Focus target Area settings. One is to press the center button on the 5 way wheel in Program mode, or the button between the menu button and the viewfinder on the upper left back of the camera. This brings up the Super Control Panel. Pressing the center button one more time activates the scrolling buttons so you can select features to modify.

Scroll to the first item on the second line. This is the focus target setting and it shows your current setting. You can use the back or front control wheel to cycle through the options until you see the one you want. Then too, you can reprogram the push down

function on the Multi Selector button, on page one of the settings menus under Multi-selector Settings, to bring up the current focus target area setting and allow you to use the control wheels to change it. The multi selector is the little joystick like button to the right of the viewfinder on the back of the camera. It rocks to move the focus target area around the screen, but it comes from the factory with the push down function disabled. Even without reprogramming, rocking the multi selector will open the current focus target area screen so you can move the target area. Using the control wheels while the screen is open with cycle through the focus target area choices. However by rocking the control you have now moved the focus area if anything other than All was selected. Make sure it is where you want it before going back to taking photos. You can recenter it by pressing down on the multi-selector once more.

Finally under button settings there is a way to reprogram the arrow buttons on the 5 way control to open the focus target area settings. If you own a previous OMD camera that does not have the little multi-selector (joy stick button), you will be used to using the arrows on the 5 way control to do this anyway.

For more or less stationary birds where there is not a lot of obscuring foliage between me and the bird, I mostly use the All focus target area. Clearly the larger the focus target area, the easier it is to make it overlap with any bird detection frames, and the smaller the focus target area is more precisely you can choose your focus point…but at the cost of having to have the focus target right over your subject all the time. With the focus target set to All, bird detection and eye-tracking are free to do all the work. When the lens is so far out of focus that the camera can not find a bird or beast, or when there is no bird or beast in the frame, AF can struggle to settle on anything. You can overcome this by manually focusing until your

subject comes somewhat into focus, or whatever else you might want to focus on is mostly in focus. Bird or animal detection will take it from there if there is a bird or animal, or the AF will find something to focus on if there is not.

For birds and wildlife where there is a lot of obscuring foliage, sticks, twigs, etc. between me and the bird, and often a confusing background as well, I attempt to convince the camera to locate the bird by manually bringing the subject into focus (which is why I set the the camera to AF-C + MF). Very often the eye-tracking will lock on at this point and all is well. If not, I use the Multi-selector joystick to switch to the single point. Single point is not as fast to pick up focus as the larger areas, and is not as reliable on birds without a lot of contrast in the feathers, but if you can get that spot on any contrasty part of any bird already outlined by subject detection then the camera will focus in seemingly impossible situations. Right through foreground foliage and twigs. (See the additional solution available with the OM-1 Mkii below.) When I save my bird modifications to a Custom Mode, I save the All focus target area, and then change to large, middle, small or single point as needed. I use the All setting, exclusively, for birds in flight where there is unlikely to be any other subject in the frame. For wildlife I begin with the All focus target area, and change to smaller areas if there is obstructing foreground.

With the OM-1 Mk ii the subject detection and eye-tracking have been reworked…you might even say *reimagined*. With the original OM-1 it always seems that there are three things going on at the same time, or at least in rapid sequence: Subject detection; eye detection and tracking; and auto focus based on the focus target area. Most of the time the three overlap well enough to achieve all but perfect focus on the bird's or beast's eye…but occasionally the subject detection and focus target area will get enough out of sync so the camera loses eye focus, and sometimes any kind of subject focus at all…jumping to something in the back or foreground. With the Mk ii focus seems to be much more eye-centric and less likely to lose the subject. In fact you can choose (AF menu #2. Subject C-AF Setting) whether the eye-tracking will use all focus points once the eye has been detected or limit itself to tracking within the target area. It seems to work best to leave the target area on All and set the Detection AF option to All as well and just let subject detection and eye-tracking auto focus do its thing. You will also notice that the subject detection box that outlines the whole bird or beast in the OM-1 is mostly gone, replaced by a detection box with little double corners when it is within the focus target area. In most situations, only the head and eye are outlined in the new system…you only see the subject detection box if the subject is outside the current focus target area, or when the camera loses sight of the eye altogether or occasionally when it first identifies the subject. Subject detection looks different… simpler and less cluttered, and it works differently.

The new OM-1 Mk ii also has the ability to detect up to 8 birds or 8 beasts in the same frame…this is a different setting than normal subject detection and must be programed to a button to work. Once the subjects are detected, you can use the control wheels to select the one you want for eye-tracking auto focus. This might work well with a flock of ducks or gulls, or a herd of antelope, but it would take some practice to be quick

enough for all but the most stationary subjects. I program it to the lower front button on the camera.

Finally the Mkii allows you to set different focus priorities for the shutter button and the AF-On button. Either can be set to Subject or Target priority. This opens the possibility of, for instance, when working feeding warblers in dense cover or wrens in the undergrowth, or elk in the forest, to set the shutter button to Subject priority, and the AF-On button to Target priority, with the focus target area set to single point. If you have Subject C-AF set to “ALL” once the target is acquired the camera behaves as if you were using the ALL target area, tracking the eye all around the view, but if subject detection fails, you can instantly switch to single point target area to cut through the obstructions just by using the AF-On button. It is not something I would use all the time, since the All target area and subject detection works so well on the Mkii, even when shooting through obstructions, but it is certainly something I will experiment with in dense cover.

Does OM-1 Mk ii’s new system work any better than the system in the original OM-1? I can only comment on the OM-1 or OM-1 Mk ii and the ED 100-400mm IS zoom which is the lens I own and use. With my 100-400mm zoom, the difference in performance, in actual practice in the field, is noticeable. Even when the OM-1 Mk ii loses target, it regains it much faster, and the lock on the eye is certainly much tighter and leads to more precise focus. Certainly if I were buying into the OM System for the first time I would prefer the simpler, cleaner, subject detection and eye-tracking of the OM-1 Mk ii. The improvements may well be much more dramatic with the Pro Series lenses, or with the new 150-600mm IS zoom. Is it worth upgrading a one or two year old Mki? Only you can put a price on the extra confidence the reimagined subject detecting, eye-tracking auto focus in the Mkii might give you.

On either camera, to make life easier, you can turn off the focus target areas that you know you are not going to use, on the Auto Focus menu, page 5. Just uncheck the focus target areas you do not plan to use, and it will be easier and quicker to scroll through the ones you do use, when selecting on with the thumb wheel.

On the Auto Focus menu pages I also set Auto focus to Continuous and turn on AF+MF. AF+MF keeps the focus ring on the lens active even in Auto Focus mode, and allows you to touch up focus as needed, or, more often, to pull or push focus quickly to about the right distance to give auto focus a better starting point.

Finally on the next AF menu page there is a setting for AF Sensitivity. This setting adjusts how quickly Auto Focus releases and resets the focus point once tracking is established. A higher sensitivity might help with rapidly moving subjects like birds in flight, or wildlife in conflict. A lower sensitivity might help with birds moving through foliage, or say, an elk moving through a stand of trees, where you want the focus to stay on the subject and not jump to every passing leaf or tree. In practice, with the OM-1, I am happy with sensitivity set to -1 for stationary and slowly moving birds and wildlife, and +1 for birds in flight and fast action. The Mkii has somewhat “stickier”

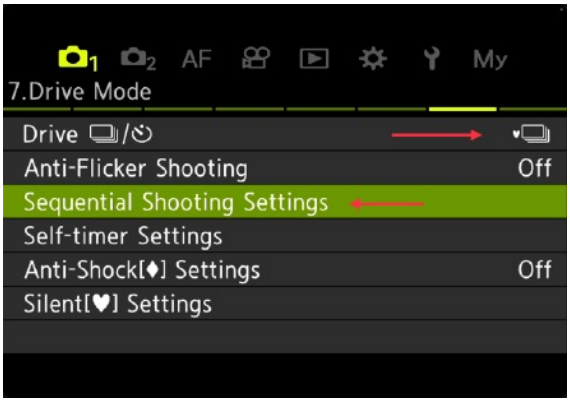
tracking, and I leave it at 0 for stationary and slowly moving birds and wildlife, and set it to +1 for birds-in-flight and action.

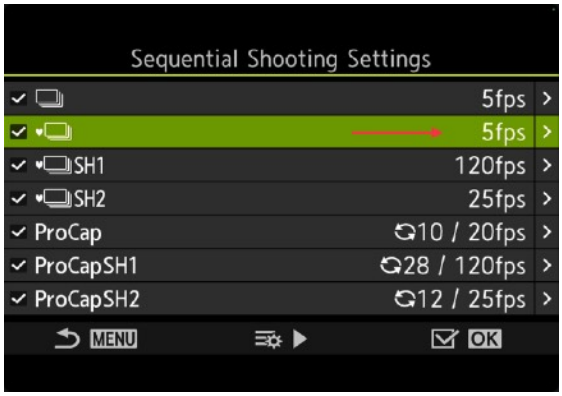
In the next Chapter we will talk about drive modes and image stabilization.

Chapter 5 Easy Birds and Wildlife with the OM Systems OM-1: Drive mode and stabilization

There are a lot of different drive modes on the OM-1, but I find that I use the same two for almost all my work with birds and wildlife. I always tell people, never take just one shot of anything. Your chances of getting what you want to go up by a factor of 5 if you take 5 shots. On the other hand, if you take 10 shots, your chances, in my experience, still only go up by a factor of 5. 20 shots? 5 possibles, one you really want, and 15 wasted shots. Etc. So choosing a drive mode for me is matter as much of limiting wasted shots as it is of getting the shot I want. I find that 5 frames per second produces the best ratio of keepers when shooting stationary and slowly moving birds and wildlife. 15 frames per second captures birds in flight and nice action sequences…with enough time between shots so that the positions in the frame and the postures of the subject have time to change.

The OM-1 has all kinds of high speed shooting modes. I don't use any of them. For one thing, in the high speed modes it is way too easy to get so far ahead of yourself and the camera that you can tie the camera up for valuable seconds at a time while it is busy writing to card after a burst of 50 or 100 shots…and it very easy to shoot off 100 shots at 25 fps… easier still at 50 fps. One of the things you can not do while the camera is writing to card, is change custom modes. So if you are shooting birds in flight and something happens on the ground that you want to catch, you can't just go back to bird mode until the camera finishes writing all your BIF shots to card. I have been caught out more than once that way.





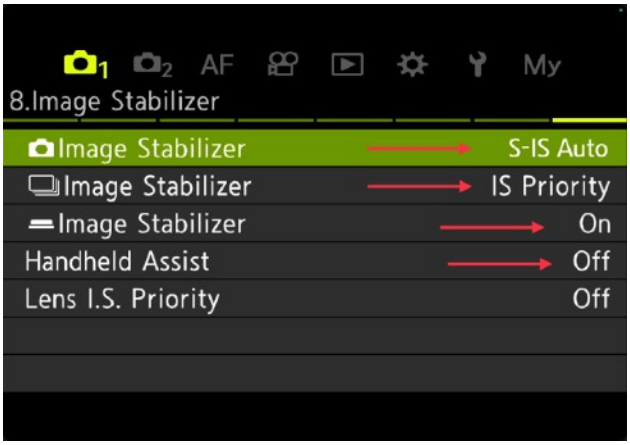
The OM-1 has two different shutters. It has a mechanical shutter which takes up to 10 frames per second, and it has an electronic shutter that will take up to 120 frames per second. For slowly moving birds and wildlife, I prefer the silent electronic shutter, set to 5 fps. Under the Sequential Shooting settings below, I adjust Anti-Shock sequential to 5 fps. This is a tricky one. Open Sequential shooting settings. Select Anti-Shock sequential. Press the right button on the 5 way control. Highlight Max fps. Press the center button. Scroll up to 5 fps and select it using the center button. Back out to the main menu. For Birds and Wildlife, set Drive to silent sequential. For birds-in-flight and action, set Drive to Silent Sequential, but adjust the frame rate to 15 frames per second.

Of course you may have valid reasons for shooting in one of the high speed modes… like for instance it you are doing an actual motion study of the subject and need to capture each tiny movement…or you are the type of person who enjoys plowing through 50 or a 100 almost identical frames to find just the right one. More power to you. The OM-1 can do that.

The OM-1 also has Pro-Capture…which is designed to help you with very active subjects. Pro Capture starts shooting as soon as you half press the shutter release, and then actually records 15 frames before and 15 frames after you fully press the shutter release. The 15 is, I think, adjustable. Yup. It records what was happening before you got the shutter button all the way down. This can increase your chances of capturing just exactly what you were after. Think of a duck leaping from its nest hole in a tree. Almost impossible if you try to press the shutter at the exact instant if takes flight. With ProCapture, you are much more likely to have the frame you were trying for. If and when I decide ProCapture is useful (probably right after I find my first duct in tree…or male Resplendent Quetzal entering the nest. I will do a chapter just on Pro-capture. Until then I will stick with 5 fps, silent sequential.

Image Stabilization is another feature of the OM-1 and OM System lenses that makes easy bird and wildlife photography possible and fun. Carrying a tripod is no fun…and

shooting off one severely limits your options. The OM-1 has in-camera stabilization using the sensor to stabilize the image, and most OM System lenses have built in optical image stabilization, which uses moving elements in the lens to stabilize the image. In-camera stabilization works with any OM System lens and many third-party lenses, but combined with the image stabilization on the Pro series lenses it can provide up to 7 stops of stabilization (8.5 on Mkii). That means that you can shoot at much slower shutter speeds and much lower ISO than you could without a tripod…and that you can shoot active wildlife in situations where a tripod would simply be impossible. Even with the non-pro series OM Systems lenses, like my ED 100-400mm IS zoom, the OM-1 will automatically choose the best combination of in-body and lens stabilization to give me 4 stops of stabilization. I have no problem hand holding the zoom at 800mm equivalent.



To engage image stabilization go to Camera Menu Page 8. Set camera image stabilizer to S-IS Auto. This sets the camera to determine the type of stabilization by sensing camera movement. Set Sequential Image Stabilizer to IS Priority so that your camera will slow down your frame rate rather than sacrificing stabilization. Set Half Press Image Stabilizer to On so that stabilization kicks in when you half press the shutter release…this makes framing telephoto shots easier. Set Handheld Assist to Off as it just clutters up the display without really doing anything to help. Set I.S. Priority to Off (unless you are using a non-OM Systems lens).

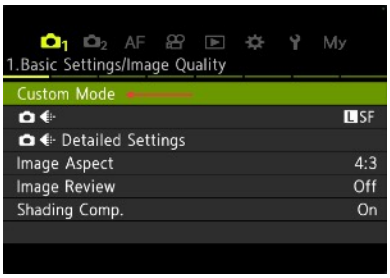
And now on to setting up your Custom Modes for birds and wildlife.

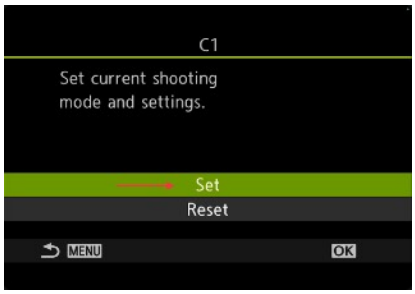
Chapter 6 Easy Birds and Wildlife with the OM Systems OM-1: Custom Modes

The OM-1 has 4 Custom Modes, each with its own position on the main control dial. This allows you to save and access up to 4 different sets of settings, or 4 different sets of modifications to to program mode. In addition, of course, the camera remembers the settings you make while in Program mode (or Shutter Program, or Aperture

Program). Every time you turn the camera on in one of those modes the settings will be just as they were when you turned the camera off. As I have covered each area of modifications to program mode above, I have mentioned various options or the bird custom mode, the birds-in-flight custom mode, and the wildlife custom mode. Here I am going to show you how to create those custom modes. (On the final pages of this chapter there are quick summaries of the settings for each mode.)

We will begin with Bird mode…note that you are not going to have to start over for each mode. Bird will be your "base" mode and you will only make the modifications necessary for the other modes.





Put the camera in Program. Reread the first, second, third, forth and fifth chapters and set the modifications, paying close attention to the specific recommendations for birds. (Or use the quick lists of modifications for each mode at the end of this chapter.) When finished, Open the menu to the first camera page and highlight Custom modes. Open it. You have 4 choices. I put my bird modifications in Custom 1 since I use them the most, but you can choose whatever mode you want. Open that number. Choose Assign. Choose Set. Back out to the main menu.

Now to create your Birds in flight modifications, you do not have to start all over. Since most of the settings are the same as Birds, if you have not made any changes to Program mode since setting your Bird Custom mode, just use the multi-selector button to open the settings for Focus Target Area and change it to All. Open the Camera Menu ISO page and set Lowest SS to 1/2000th to freeze wingtips, 1/1250 to freeze only the body of the bird. Go to the third page of the Camera AF menu and set AF Sensitivity to +1. This will increase your chances of getting correctly focused moving birds against the sky or a distant background of trees and brush. Now go back to the first Camera menu page and set this modification to a different Custom mode. I use 2.

If you have made changes to Program mode between setting your bird custom mode and your birds in flight

custom mode, with the camera in Program mode, open custom modes in the menu. Choose the one you set your bird modifications to. Choose recall. This will overwrite any Program settings you have changed and replace them with your Bird settings. Now proceed as above.

To create your wildlife custom mode, start in Program with your bird custom mode again by using Recall Custom to overwrite your current Program settings.

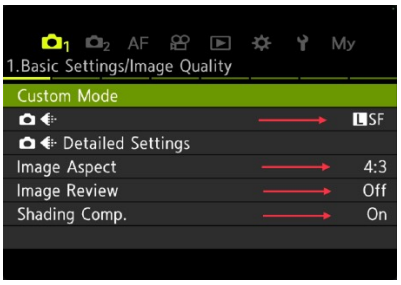
Go to the subject detection settings under Auto Focus and choose Dogs and Cats. Go to the focus target area settings and set it to All if it is not already there. Now save those modifications to a Custom Mode (I use 3).

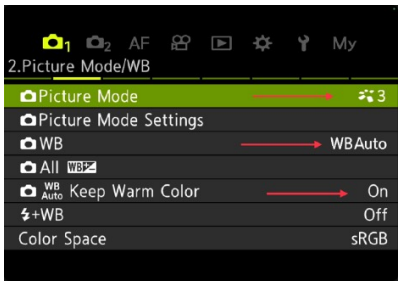
I then create a general purpose Program mode set with the kind of settings I might use for people or landscapes, or a basic set up for when I want to use the computational photography features. Single shot. Face detection. Upper ISO limit increased for low light, etc. and set that to Custom 4 so I can get back to it when I want it. If I want it. Even after I have made changes to program. This is the equivalent of my Auto setting on the OM-1.

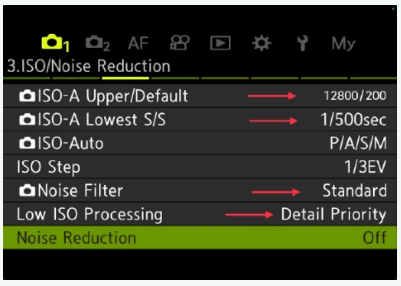
In the next chapter I will cover the configuration of buttons on the camera that make operations in the field easy.

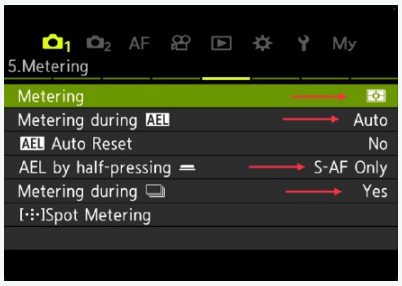
Easy Birds and Wildlife with the OM-1: Program modifications.

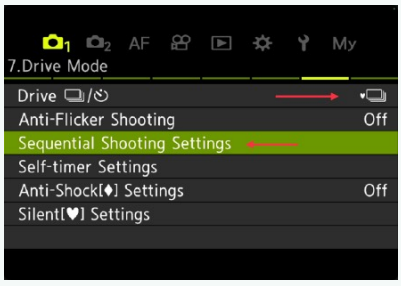
Birds: if a menu page is not shown, it means there are no modifications there.

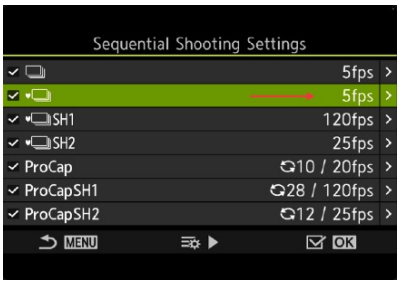


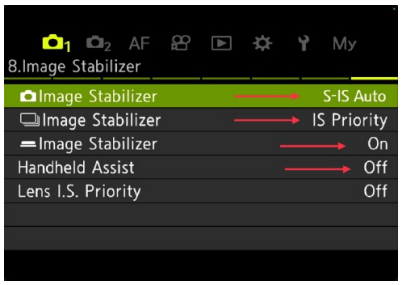


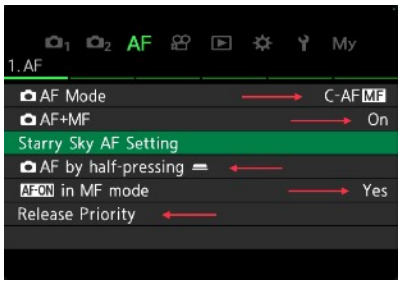


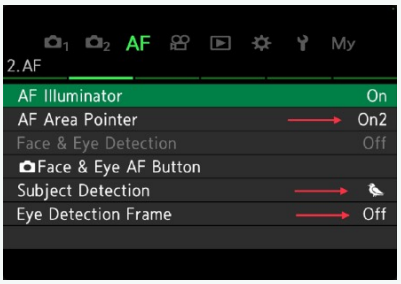


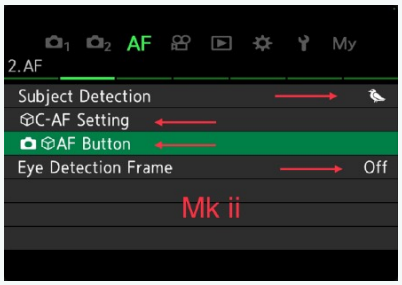


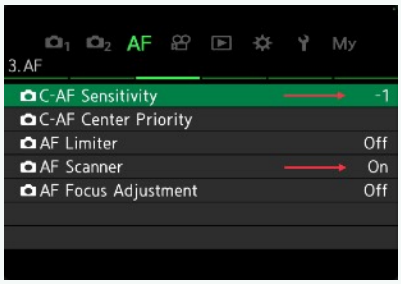


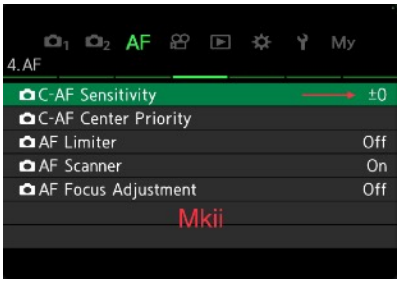


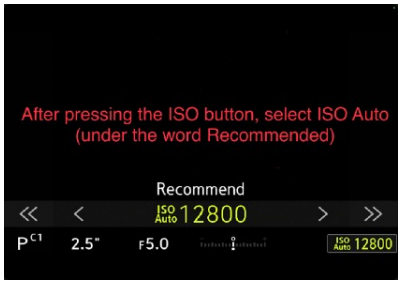


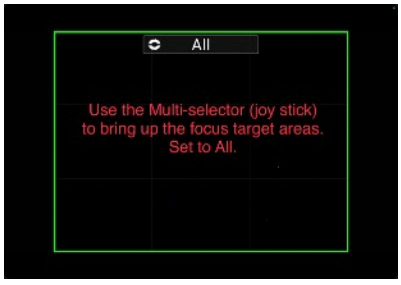




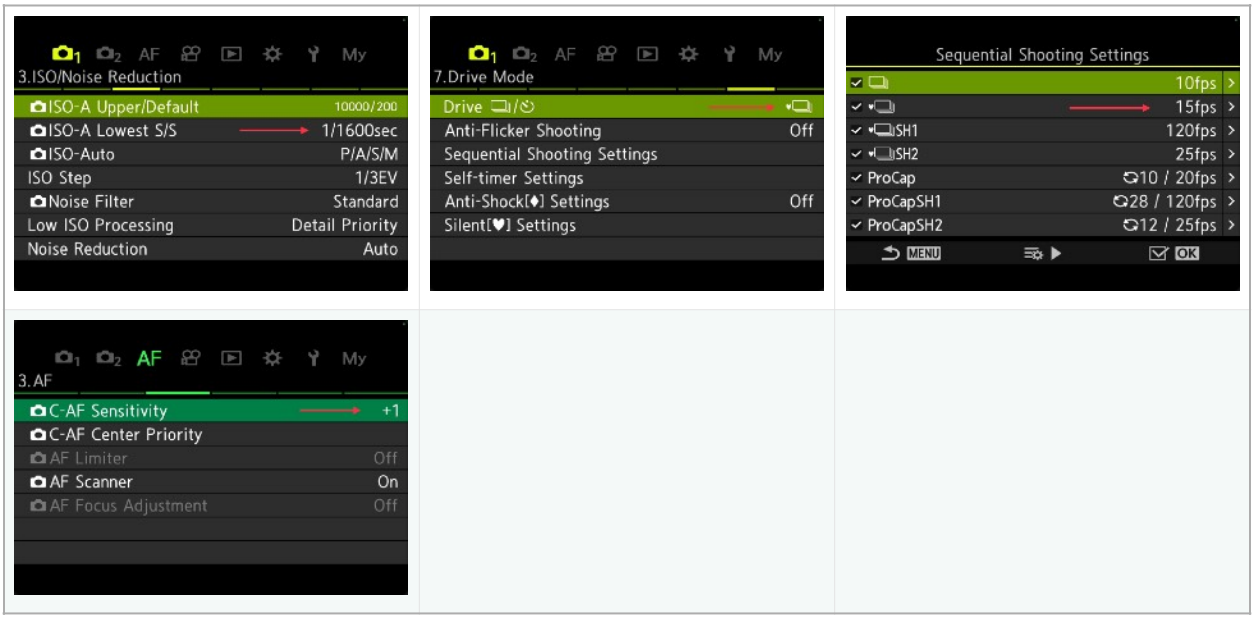




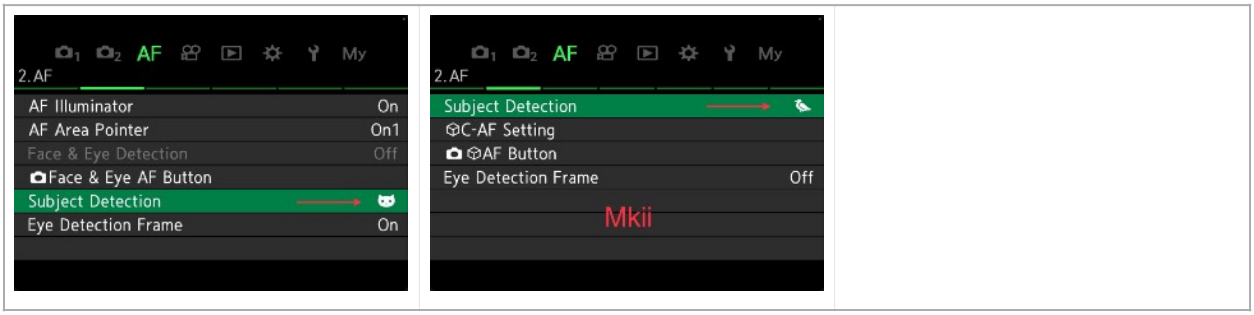




Birds in Flight (Based on the Bird settings above, make these modifications. if a menu page is not shown here, there are no modifications to be made)



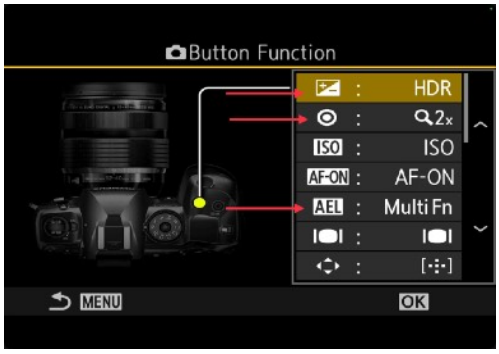
Wildlife (based on the Bird modifications above, make these modifications)



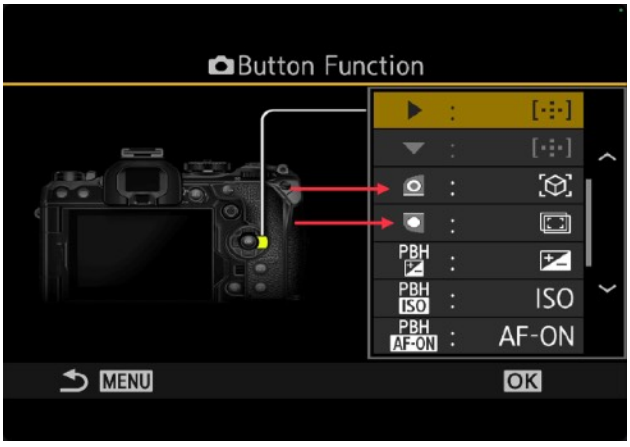
Chapter 7 Easy Birds and Wildlife on the OM Systems OM-1: Button layout.

It is all about buttons. There are lots of buttons on the body of the OM-1 and most of them already have an assigned function. However, it is possible to reprogram almost all of them to do mostly whatever you want.

You now have 3 custom modes. One for birds, one of birds-in-flight, and one for wildlife. You can, of course set them by just putting the main control dial in Custom 1, custom 2, etc. I used to program my custom modes to three body buttons, but I found that in practice I never used them. For one thing body buttons for custom modes only work if the main control dial is in Program (or Shutter or Aperture) position. No button will override the Control Dial setting when it is in a custom mode. I find it easier overall to just use the Control Dial to switch back and forth between Custom modes. With practice you can do this without taking your eye away from the viewfinder.



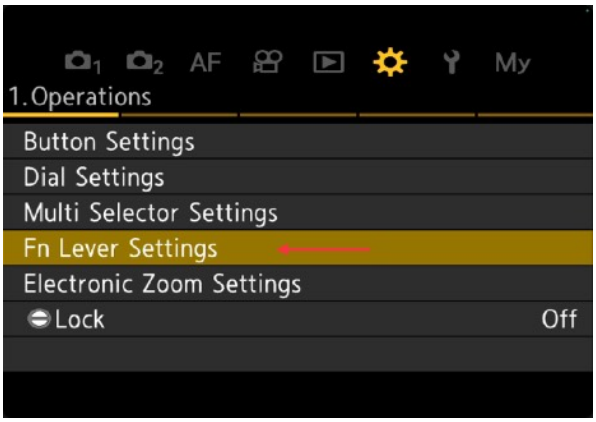
There is “hidden” feature of the OM-1 that can only be accessed by setting it to a button. That is the 2x digital tel-converter. When shooting jpeg, the tel-converter takes only the center section of the sensor, and uses AI to enlarge it in the camera, to give you the field of view of a lens of twice your real focal length. On the ED 100-400mm zoom, which is already an 800mm equivalent in full frame terms, this gives you the equivalent of a 1600mm lens. While the quality is not as good as a “real” 1600mm lens, it might be better than you would get by cropping the 800mm shot. It can come in handy for the wee and far critters, and even for a close-up of birds and wildlife at moderate distances. It seems to do best with shots that already have a frame full of detail, so it works really well for telephoto macros at the closest focus distance of the lens. I program this feature to the movie button, which is useless in normal camera mode anyway.

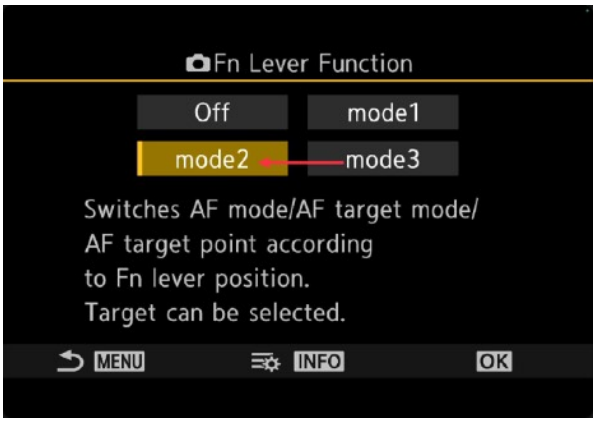


I program HDR, which I will sometimes use if the the bird or wildlife is in a situation with a lot of contrast, and sometimes in low light with stationary subjects to smooth out noise, to the EV button, since EV is easily accessible in Program mode using the front control wheel.

I program the top front button to turn subject detection on and off…since there are times when I want to use normal auto focus. Having the button programed also allow me change the subject detection by turning the front or back control wheel while holding the button down. It is sometimes easier to do this then to switch to my Animal mode using the Custom 3 on the main control dial.

I program focus stacking, which I use on occasion when shooting flocks of birds or macro with the ED 100-400mm IS zoom to the bottom front button. (On the Mkii I use this button to turn on and off the multi subject detection mode.)





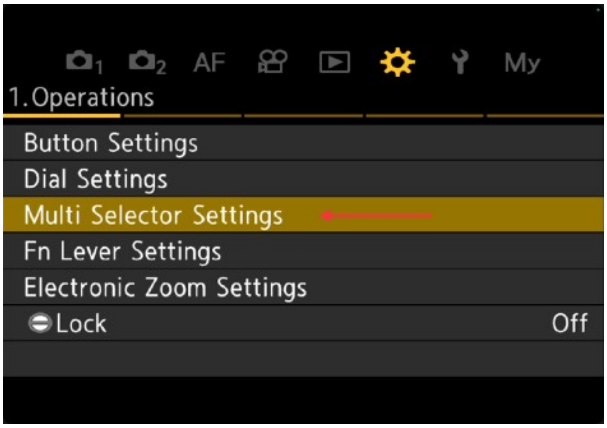
Finally, we can set the function lever around the the AEL button to quickly change between Single Frame Autofocus and Continuous Auto Focus. This comes in handy when you have a situation where there are a lot of foreground obstructions and Continuous Focus just keeps jumping around rather than holding on the subject. If you switch to single frame focus then half press to lock focus on your subject, it will not change as you reframe your shot, or, for instance, as the wind blows foreground vegetation around. To set the function lever go to the same settings menu page with the other button settings and scroll down to Fn Lever Settings. Open it and choose Camera Fn Lever. Choose Mode 2.

Next we will cover Shadow/Highlight Control for those times when you might want to use it.

Chapter 8: Going further — Shadow/Highlight Control

Given the OM-1's tendency to favor shadow detail over highlight detail, there are situations and subjects were it is a challenge to hold detail in the highlights without turning the shadows to mud. The OM-1's Shadow/Highlight Control does give you direct control over how the shadows and the highlights are processed, not-unlike the

tone curve in a post processing program. In order to access it, you have to program the feature to one of the buttons on the camera. (My button settings for general shooting were covered above.) To do this you have to go to the Settings Menu pages (the little gear icon). The first item is Button Settings. You can also access Button Settings from the super control panel using the gear icon. Under Button Settings you have choices for Camera and Movie. Under the Camera choices, you will get a picture of the camera with all its buttons highlighted and attached to their current functions. For Shadow/Highlight control I use the AEL button, as I never use it (especially since half pressing the shutter in Single Frame shooting locks the exposure anyway and I don't want it locked in continuous or sequential shooting, as explained.) You can use whatever button you choose, but I would choose a button that you do not normally use. For now just choose a button. Highlight it and press the center button on the 5 way control. Scroll down to the very last set of button options and choose MultiFn. Choose it and exit all menus.



With the camera in Program, press the button you choose. You will see a little graph in the viewfinder or on the back LCD screen with the shadow highlight curve (line), and the abbreviations Sh (shadow) and Hi (highlights) with the symbols for the front and rear thumb wheels…rear for shadow, front for highlight. Turning these wheels allows you to adjust the curve in one EV increments.

Given time, in a situation where the highlights look like they might blow out, or loose detail, I will use shadow/highlight control to reduce the highlights by as much as 7 EV, though 4 EV will generally work as well. The camera will remember this setting until I change the Custom mode or turn the camera off and back on. It is important to remember that some subjects, in some lighting, will simply be beyond the dynamic range of the sensor…no amount of adjustment will hold detail in the highlights… without turning the shadows so dark you loose all detail there. Most often, just using Natural Picture Mode will give you the best possible detail in both shadows and highlights. But it is worth learning to use Shadow/Highlight control for those times when you have time to experiment and the lighting is particularly challenging.

Next we will cover lens choice and field craft.

Chapter 9: Easy Birds and Wildlife with the OM Systems OM-1: lens choice and field craft

There at several lenses in the OM Systems line up that work well for birds and wildlife. My pick is the ED 100-400mm IS zoom. I like the short end of zoom, 200mm equivalent, for larger wildlife and I like the long end of the zoom, 800mm equivalent, for small birds and larger birds at a distance. And I have the full range between for framing whatever I need. That the lens is relatively light weight and compact is a bonus, as is the fact that it focuses to just over 4 feet, for an effective .5x long range macro when I need it. I find it to be tack sharp across its range, and, though it does not have the best possible Image Stabilization with the OM-1, that is reserved for Pro class lenses, the IS is still good enough so that I can easily hand hold the lens at 1/640th of a second, even at 800mm equivalent. And it is relatively inexpensive as 400mm lenses go.

Then there is the ED 300mm Pro IS. Some think this lens is even sharper than the 100-400 zoom, it is a full stop and half faster so more effective in low light, and it does have the best in class image stabilization with the OM-1. However, for me the limitation of the shorter focal length and the inability to change my field of view as needed keeps me from investing in one. I would need the 1.4 or 2x

extender for reach, and even then I would still lack zoom. Then too, at closest focus distance it only does .24x, half of what the 100-400 reaches, so not so great for macro work. And the low light performance of the f6.3 zoom with the OM-1 is enough for my purposes.

Finally there is the newer ED 150-400 f4.5 Pro IS zoom. If this lens were not so much larger and heavier than the 100-400, and so much more expensive, I would own one. :) All the advantages of the 300mm and none of the drawbacks. Its drawbacks are its own: size, weight, and cost! Of course, with the built in 1.2x tel-converter it reaches 500mm for a 1000mm equivalent field of view…and a macro magnification of something like .75x. A great bird and wildlife lens.

Then there is the newly released 150-600 IS with its 300 to 1200mm equivalent field of view. Aside from being quite large and heavy…this is also a modified version of the Sigma 150-600mm Sports, which, in other mounts, sells for half of what OM Systems is asking. They may have improved the stabilization (it works with Sync IBIS to give 7 stops of stabilization), and the weather sealing, but it is hard for me to understand that large a price difference. Still, there is, for pure reach, nothing to touch it on the market. 1200mm equivalent! It will be great for small birds.

Some people like the little 40-150 and stack it with a 2x extender to reach the 600mm minimum I feel you need for small birds and distant wildlife…but really…no.

Which brings us to field craft.

First, I highly recommend the Cotton Carrier for the OM-1 and any of the lenses above. Accept no substitutes! The original and authentic Cotton Carrier is the one to get. It it is just designed better, is made of better materials, and works better and faster than any of its imitators. Once you get used to mounting and unmounting the camera and lens, you can do it in less than 3 seconds, and having the camera securely on your chest while moving around is so much better than having it hanging off your shoulder. You will need a “back-up” strap for when the camera and lens are actually in use. I recommend the Peak Design or Black Rapid straps attached to the Camera tripod socket, while your Cotton Carrier mount is attached to the socket on the lens. Best of both worlds. Belt and suspenders. (As a parentheses here, I have actually taken the tripod foot off my 100-400mm zoom, as I

never use it. When I need extra support I use my Beanbag head monopod…I have a video in my Point and Shoot playlist on making one. The tripod foot just adds weight to the lens and can get in way when handholding. If I do need it, it slips back onto the lens in a second. Without the tripod foot, I attach the Cotton Carrier mount to the tripod socket on the body of the OM1, and still use the Peak Design slider strap attached to the strap lugs. All secure, and it is even easier to get the camera on and off the carrier. In addition, it makes the whole rig feel much more compact…and you save some weight.) Still…

Hand holding a long lens is a skill that has to be developed. The primary rule is to support the camera and lens with the bones of your arms and hands, not with the muscles. Muscles tire, bones do not. Muscles flex, bones do not. Therefore you need to adopt a stance that places the supporting arm directly under the lens, with your elbow tucked in to your body as much as possible. You and do this off-shoulder, with your body turned 1/4 toward your subject, or face on, with the camera and lens right in front of you and your head turned slightly to see through the viewfinder. Either way, if you do it right, you should be able to relax your muscles, supporting the camera on the bones of one arm and hand, while the other hand guides the camera for framing and operates the controls. Practice!




The other solution is to build and use a bean bag monopod, as above, using the instructions in one of my videos. :) (While the monopod is great for taking the weight off your arms during long sessions…my recent experience with image stabilized lenses suggests that it might not actually be any better, and might be worse, than hand holding the lens.)

You have three custom modes. Spend time practicing with each one. Go out just to practice. Find a good bird spot, a good birds in flight spot, and a good wildlife spot. A local park or any pond or marsh is good for birds. The beach for birds in flight…or, even better, the local dump. Even if you live downtown, there are always pigeons and house sparrows. If you can't find a wildlife spot, practice on cows, sheep, goats, dogs and cats. You are not, at this point, looking for great photos…you are just developing confidence in the camera and your Custom Modes…and getting used to switching modes as needed.

Since the focus target area is so important to your success with any custom mode, practice changing it and even moving it around on the sensor using the Multi-selector button until you are comfortable that you can change it as needed and quickly in the field. Do Not wait to practice changing the focus target area until your first trip to Costa Rica or Uganda! Practice it in your back yard or off the balcony in your apartment building until it gets programed into your muscles.

Make sure you remember which buttons do what. This is good advice for any reprogrammed button, but especially important for the buttons assigned to your custom modes. Take out the camera and review how you have the buttons set up at least once a week. I know. Sounds boring. But you will be very thankful you spent the time when the Resplendent Quetzal pops its head out of the nest hole in Costa Rica, and then takes fight :) No fumbles. That is the goal.

The first burst of shots of anything significant, be it bird or beast, are taken any old how. Just get the camera up and a burst away. Then, if the subject is still in sight, check to make sure you are in the right custom mode, and begin to think about how to frame it to best effect. Play with different zoom settings. Put the bird or beeasie in different parts of the frame. Move yourself to get slightly different angles and lines of sight and backgrounds. Begin to think about the best framing and the best shot. But all this happens after your first point-and-shoot burst.

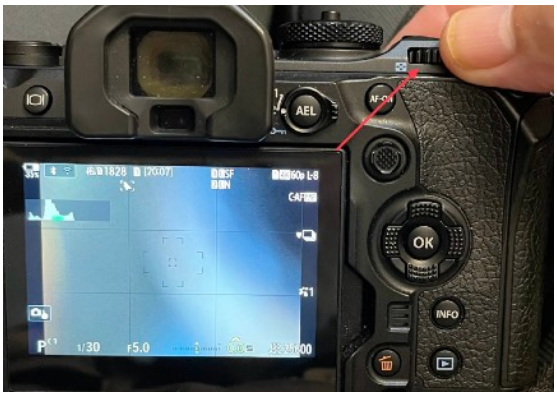
Don't forget how easy Exposure Compensation is to use on the OM-1. It is just a roll of that front control wheel away. (One of the most significant improvements of the OM-1 Mk ii might turn out to be the improvement in the feel and ease of function of these control wheels.) Though the modifications we have made to Program will take care of maybe 90 percent of exposure challenges, there are still cases where some compensation, either negative or positive, will help. Birds in flight against anything but a clear blue sky are going to need a little bit of extra light. Twiddle the thumb wheel to the plus side (maybe to +0.7). White birds, especially in sunlight. will show more feather detail if you set exposure compensation to something like -0.7. Is the giraffe standing with its head in the shadow of the tree? Get a little more light on the subject. On the other hand, don't over-think it. Most of the time, with most subjects, EV compensation will not be needed. Don't use it as your final ditch way of being in control. Let the camera do its job. And don't set your expectations too high. Some shots are just so heavily backlit, or so poorly back and front lit, that there is nothing you can do to get a satisfying shot. Birds in the top branches of a tree against

a plain white cloudy sky…good luck! Some shots just can't be done. (This one might be worthy of a whole chapter of its own…maybe soon.)

And while we are talking about extra control features, there are a few body buttons you might want to be more aware of. Don't forget we set the function lever around the AEL button to change between single frame and continuous auto focus. This can be handy when the focus keeps popping off your bird or beast of choice. Setting Auto Focus to single frame and half pressing the shutter release will lock focus on whatever is under the focus target area at that moment.

Then there are the two buttons on the cap of the on off lever on the left side of the top of the camera. The front one gives you access to your drive mode settings. Want to switch to SH1 or SH2 for a burst of intense action or a fast flying bird. Press the button and rotate the rear wheel. Do the same if you want to try one of the ProCapture modes.

The back button in the on off cap gives access to both the metering pattern settings and the AF mode settings. The Function lever on the AEL button is handier for changing between single frame and continuous auto focus, but should you find the need to change metering patterns, to spot for instance in really tricky lighting, the front thumb wheel will do that after pressing the back on of cap button.



Finally the back conrol wheel in Program mode controls Program Shift. Program will almost always select the largest aperture and the fastest shutter speed consistent with the light levels, so you won't have to adjust the Program for shallow depth of field, and you are unlikely to be able to select a faster shutter speed…but you might want to select a smaller aperture for greater depth of field, or a slower shutter speed to blur motion (moving water for instance). The back thumb wheel allows you to do this without over or underexposing the image by adjusting both aperture and shutter speed at the same time to maintain a balanced exposure. That's what Program Shift means.

Above all, when in the field, do not try to out-think the camera. You set it for the best results. Trust it to do its job, and get on with yours. Only you can put yourself in the right place at the right time. Only you can find and frame the birds or beasts. Only you can decide what is worth framing…or how it fits best in the frame. You do you, and let the camera do everything it can for you.

All that matters in the end are the satisfying images. You get no extra credit for doing it the hard way. No one cares. Just find and frame what needs finding and framing and don't let anyone tell you you are not a real photographer because you let the camera do the grunt work or because you shoot in jpeg. A camera that is able to do everything it can for you is what you paid the big bucks for anyway.

And that's Steve Ingraham's Easy Birds and Wildlife with the OM-1 in a nutshell.

After word: A brief history of Steve Ingraham's Easy Birds and Wildlife Photography (and a rebranding)

Once upon a time, many years ago, I discovered point and shoot superzoom cameras, sometimes called bridge cameras back then…since they were more sophisticated than your average pocket camera, but did not have the interchangeable lenses the pros and advanced amateurs used. They were small, relatively light weight, relatively inexpensive, and featured zooms that would, at least after a few generations, fill the frame with a bird or beastie from reasonable distances. They had really small sensors, the same size as the true pocket cameras, but the image quality was good…good enough for internet use certainly, and the occasional print for the wall, or self-published coffee table book. They also had some of the best automation available, often better than the then current crop of full-sized digital cameras. That combination of features made them ideal for an entry into the world of bird and wildlife photography…nature photography in general. After a few years I wrote a book about Point and Shoot Nature Photography, which is still available on Amazon and still sells a couple of hundred copies a year, and began to teach the Point and Shoot method at workshops at birding festivals and on Point and Shoot specific trips to bird and wildlifey places all over the world. I have a website and publish articles and reviews and video instruction, and a daily photo for inspiration. I have a Point and Shoot Nature Photography FaceBook group, and, when Google Plus was a thing, had close to 500,000 followers.

The basic premise of Point and Shoot Nature Photography has always been: set the camera's automation up to produce consistently well exposed and correctly focused jpeg images right out of the camera so that you, the photographer, can concentrate on what only you can do…seeing and framing nature. Let the camera do its job, and you do yours.

However, you can no longer buy a new (or at least newly updated and released) Point and Shoot superzoom camera. The last ones were introduced several years ago now. Even the one inch sensor long zoom cameras from Sony and Panasonic, which replaced conventional small sensor P&S cameras in my hands as soon as they came on the market because of their better image quality and more robust build…seem to have stalled in development. It is all phones and mirrorless interchangeable lens systems today, even among pro nature photographers. I, myself, recently switched to the OM Systems OM-1 and a 100-400mm zoom for birds and wildlife, mainly because I got tired of waiting for Sony to add bird and wildlife eye tracking focus to their RX10 series cameras. I only have so many years left as an active photographer, and I want to try the latest tricks.

So maybe it is time for a rebranding exercise. Point and Shoot Nature Photography is now Steve Ingraham's Easy Nature Photography, as in Steve Ingraham's Easy Birds and Wildlife with the OM Systems OM-1, etc.

Life, and easy nature photography, goes on. A rose by any other name, etc.

My goal has always been to promote a method of nature photography easy enough so that anyone can do it. The more eyes we have on nature today, the more engaged hearts and minds, the better for our world. Or that is what I think anyway.