

# Point and Shoot Nature Photography with the Sony RX10 V

Part 2, Macro and Landscape.



I am assuming that you have worked through Part 1 already, and that you are familiar with the process of making modifications to Program mode and saving them on the RX10 V. I am assuming that you already have Birds and Wildlife and Flight and Action saved in Memory 3 and Memory 4 (MR3 and MR4).

Sony actually provides a ready-made Auto Scene Select Mode for both Landscape and Macro. And for the occasional casual passing landscape or macro, they work fine. They certainly work well for those who shoot in Auto all the time, as the Scene Select feature recognizes both your attempts at landscape and your attempts at macro and makes appropriate adjustments for each scene. I am not going to speculate on what adjustments each scene mode makes, but the landscapes will be vivid, with deep blue skies and textured clouds, the trees and grass will be bright green, and the water will have a pleasing sparkle. For macros, there will be good detail and a pleasing separation between the subject and the background. They will both look good. There is no reason not to use Landscape Scene Mode or Macro Scene Mode for occasional shooting.

However, when using Scene Mode, there are certain things you cannot do. You can only change the focus point by touching the screen; otherwise, the camera chooses the focus point for you. You cannot use Exposure Compensation to tweak the exposure. You cannot use Creative Looks to tweak the processing. DRO is limited to Auto. And I do not always understand Sony's decisions about exposure.

So when I am serious about the landscape, which I often am, or serious about the macro of the moss and lichen or mushrooms, I would rather work in Program mode where I have some say in how the image is exposed and processed. Or in Aperture mode for macros, since to me, depth of field is a major part of successful macros.

There is one very good reason why you might want to use Sony's Landscape mode. My Landscape mode requires careful and thoughtful post processing. The Sony landscapes, some of the time, might require little or no editing. (Perhaps a bit of sharpening, and some raising of the shadows, but that is about all.)



In the examples above Sony's Landscape Mode (top set) did what it often does and underexposed the foreground to save the sky. Processed with my standard HDR effect preset in Photomator it looks like the image on the right. My Landscape mode, looks fatter but with more detail in the shadows. Using the same processing yields the photo on the right. Notice the extra detail in the clouds, the more natural greens, and the more open shadows. :)

Should you want to use Sony's Landscape mode it is easy to get to under Auto, or you can go back to Camera, Shooting Mode, Shooting Mode Limit, and add it to your list of available modes, simply by checking Landscape Mode, instead of checking whichever memory mode you might choose for my Landscape modifications (either MR1 or MR2). Now when you have the main control dial in the Star position, pressing the lens button will cycle through Birds and Wildlife, Flight and Action, and Sony's Landscape mode.

Of course it is always available with the Main Control Dial in the Auto position.

Should you want to try my Landscape mode, and have a bit more control over the way the Landscape comes out, you can start with the Birds and Wildlife settings, by opening the menu, Camera, Shooting Mode, Shoot Mode, and setting it to MR3, or by putting the main control dial in the Star position and using your custom button to select your Birds and Wildlife memory. This will not be as simple as creating the Flight and Action set from the Birds and Wildlife set, as there are more changes to made. Just remember you only have to do this once (and you do not have to do it at all if Landscape is not a primary focus for you.)

Here are the changes you will make. Your goal is to produce a landscape, with each attempt, that looks natural—that has the same range of darks and lights, the same detail in both shadows and highlights—as our unaided eye sees—and that has colors that neither too vivid or too dull. Just right. You want to capture the drama of big skies over a dappled landscape, and you want to capture the intimacy of sun spots under a dense canopy, and water in all its forms and all its glory. Not an easy thing to do.

Change Camera, Drive Mode, Drive Mode to Single Shooting. If you need more than one shot of the landscape, deliberately take a second shot and give yourself time to reconsider the composition (framing).

Change Camera, Shutter, Shutter Type to Mechanical (there are always those who think that the mechanical shutter, being separate from the sensor, allows the sensor to deliver more dynamic range than the electronic shutter. And on some cameras, this is definitely true. So why not?)

Change Exposure, Exposure, ISO Auto Min. SS to Slow. (For maximum detail and the best colors, you want to keep the ISO as low as possible.)

Change Metering, Metering Mode to Multi

Change Exposure, Color Tone, DRO to Level 7 (You want to draw out as much shadow detail as possible.)

Change Exposure, Color Tone, Creative Look to Standard, with these modifications: Highlights -6, Shadows +4, Sharpness to 3, Clarity to 0. (Again trying to tame the highlights and raise the shadow detail. Both Sharpness and Clarity, in sharpening and clarifying, increase the local contrast of the image and affect the dynamic range.)

Change Focus, AF/MF, Focus Mode to Single Shot AF. (You do not need Continuous Focus for landscapes, and if you reframe and take another photo, the camera will refocus anyway.)

Change Focus, Focus Area, Focus Area to Wide.

Change Focus, Subject Recognition, Subject Recognition in AF to Off. (You might want to set this to Human, if you always center your landscapes around any human in view. Otherwise, you do not need subject recognition since the landscape itself is your subject.)

Close the menus.  
Zoom the lens all the way back in to 24mm.  
Set Exposure Compensation to -0.3 using the dial.

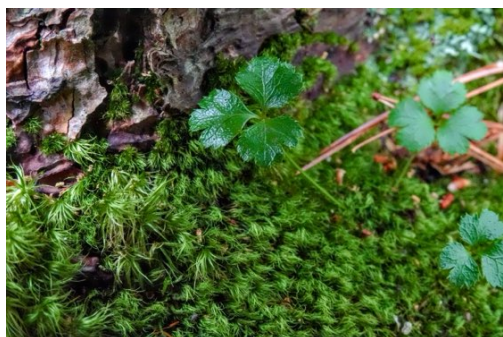
Reopen the menus.  
Under Camera, Shooting Mode, Camera Set Memory, save this set of modifications to MR1 or MR2, so that you can access it directly from the Main Control Dial. Give it a memorable name.

Now, when you see a landscape that needs imaging, set the Main Control Dial to 1 or 2 (where you stored your Landscape mode). Easy. See the scene. Choose your mode. Point and shoot.

When using this landscape mode, the view, either on the LCD or in the EVF, will look a little “flat”, certainly when compared to the vivid colors of Sony’s Scene Select Landscape mode. The image that the camera produces will be similarly flat-looking. It will require post-processing to adjust highlights and shadows, add vividness, sharpness, and clarity, and perhaps even a bit of contrast. But you have plenty of time to make these decisions with the image up on your monitor or screen in an editing app. The data you need to work with will be there in the file. You just need to bring it out.

And remember, there is no shame in deciding that you do not want to do that. Just use Sony’s Landscape mode. In most cases only a discerning eye will see any difference. Maybe only you will see the difference.

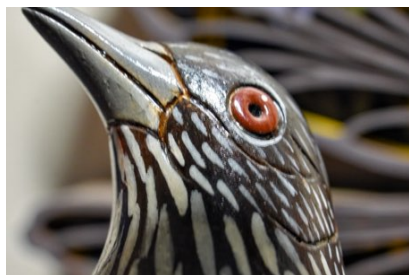
# Macro



Let's clear something up here first. Sony claims a .49 magnification at 600mm and 28 inches, and a similar magnification at 24mm from a few centimeters. By anyone else's standards, that should be one-half life size. If you compare an image taken at those settings to one taken with a lens that actually has a .5 magnification, like the Sigma 16-300 Contemporary on the Sony a6700 at 50-70mm and less than an inch from the front element, or the Tamron 50-400 at 70-100mm, from a bit further away, you will see that subject in the RX10 V image appears to be about 1/2 the size it is in the a6700 shot—it is actually slightly

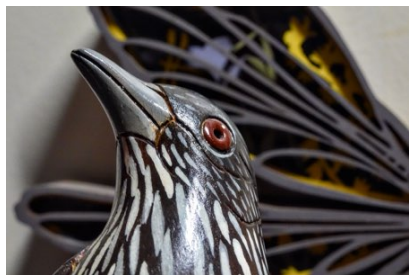
less than half the size by my measurements. It takes up less than half as much of the frame as it should. After some research, I discovered that Sony is quoting what they originally called “35mm equivalent magnification”. (Whatever that is supposed to mean.) Somehow, the “equivalent” dropped out of their marketing materials, and only a very few have ever called them on it since the RX10 III was released. So when you see reviewers quoting the .49 magnification as though it means half-life size and comparing it to other lenses that offer true half-life size performance—don't believe it. The magnification of the ZEISS lens is actually in the range of .2—very similar to the magnification of some of Sony's own full-frame zooms.

Here are two shots to demonstrate. Not great shots. Handheld in artificial light. The first is true half life-sized from the Sigma 15-300 at less than an inch. The second is the RX10 V at 600mm from 28 inches—as close as you can get and its largest magnification.



Then too, a working distance of a few centimeters or 28 inches is not ideal. At 600mm and 28 inches, this is a great lens for insects—bees, butterflies, dragonflies, and damselflies—and some flowers—but down on the forest floor photographing

moss and lichen, mushrooms, and miniature landscapes, having to be 28 inches from your subject is a real problem—it is even a problem with real closeups of flowers or, say, coins. Even supporting the camera on a tripod short enough for forest floor work with the lens fully extended is problematic.



As it happens, you can also get the same magnification—whether you call it .2 or .49—at 60mm from about 2-3 inches from the front element. That is a very workable working distance for almost any tiny thing you might want to photograph, and with the lens only extended to 60mm, the camera is much easier to support, either hand-held or on a tripod. Finding that macro sweet spot has changed the way I work with macros on the RX10 V. This shot is at 60mm.

And finally the RX10 V has a real advantage for this kind of

forest floor macro: at 60mm on the zoom the real focal length and depth of field are that of a 22mm lens.

Oh, I still shoot insects and many flowers at 600mm. But for forest floor macros, 60mm is the place to be.

I mentioned that Sony already has a Macro Scene Selection Mode under Auto. And once more, if you are not really into macros, it may do you just fine. Once more, you can add it to your selected Shooting Modes under Shoot Mode Limits, and make it part of your rotation of modes along with Birds and Wildlife, Flight and Action, and Landscape (Sony's or our own), or you can just put the Main Control Dial in the Auto position and select it from there.

If you are interested in more thoughtful macro work, then I have developed a set of modifications based on the Aperture Mode. One of the major limitations of all macro work is depth of field—how much of your very close subject is in focus at the same time. To increase depth of field, you need direct control over the Aperture. Larger apertures (smaller numbers) equal shallow depth of field. Smaller apertures (larger numbers) equal more depth of field.

You will also want to be able to precisely control where the focus point is. It will often not be on the closest object in view. Carefully placing it is part of the art of macro.

To create a macro mode, we start by putting the main camera dial in the A position. (Because we are now using A, you will have to reset many of the modifications we already made when setting up your Bird and Wildlife mode in P but remember, you only have to do it once.)

Open the menu system with the button.

Set Camera, Image Quality/Rec, JPEG/HEIF Switch to HEIF (4.2.2)

Set Camera, Image Quality/Rec, Camera File Format to HEIF

Set Camera, Image Quality/Rec, HEIF Quality to Extra Fine

Set Camera, Image Quality/Rec, HEIF Image Size to L:20M

Set Camera, Shooting Mode, Camera Shoot Mode Limit to MR3, MR4. (uncheck all other modes. This maybe already be the setting but check since we are not in A, not P.)

Set Camera, Drive Mode, Drive mode to Continuous Shooting, Lo (Low, 5 fps)

Set Camera, Shutter, Shutter Type to Mechanical

Set Camera, Image Stabilization, Camera Steady Shot, to ON

Set Camera, Zoom, Zoom Range, to Clear Image Zoom. Macro is the one place where Clear Image Zoom makes sense. It gives you more than half life-size at 600mm and 28 inches, with very little loss of quality.

Set Exposure, Exposure, ISO to Auto

Set Exposure, ISO Range Limit to Minimum 100, Maximum 8000

Set Exposure, ISO AUTO Min. SS to either Standard or 1/100th (they do much the same thing)

Set Exposure Metering, Metering Mode to Spot.

Set Exposure, Color/Tone, DRO, to Auto

Set Exposure, Color/Tone, Creative Look to STD (Standard), and make these modifications to the parameters: Highlights -9, Shadows +3, Sharpness 5, Clarity 2.

Set Focus, AF/MF, Focus Mode to Single Shot

Set Focus, Focus Area, to Expandable Movable Spot.

Set Focus, Focus Area Limit to Wide, XL-Spot and Expanded Spot (uncheck all other options).

Set Focus, Subject Recognition, Subject Recog in AF to ON (in case you use your macro settings for insects, etc.)

Set Focus, Subject Recognition, Recognition Target to Auto

Set Focus, Recog Trgt Select Set, to Auto, Animal/Bird, and Insect. (uncheck all other options)

Set Focus, Focus Assistant, Auto Magnifier in MF to Off

Set Focus, Peaking Display, Peaking Display, to Off.

Close the menus.

Set Exposure Compensation to -0.3 using dial 2 on the top of the camera (or whichever dial you set to Exposure Compensation).

Zoom the zoom out to 60mm.

Set the Aperture ring on the lens to f/8 (a good compromise of sharpness and depth of field).

Open the menus again.

Under Camera, Shooting Mode, Camera Set Memory, give this mode a memorable name, and save these settings to MR1 or MR2 (whichever one you did not use for landscape).

Now when you want to use your Macro mode, just put the Main Control Dial in either the 1 or the 2 position, depending on where you stored it.

## Field tips

Most of the time when shooting semi-macros of insects, I use the Birds and Wildlife mode with its higher shutter speeds, shooting at 600mm from as close as I can get. Sometimes I have to back up.



When doing forest floor macro, I highly recommend investing in a tiny carbon fiber table-top tripod. They are small and light enough to fit in a large vest pocket. Find one where the legs fold out in three steps so the head can rest right on the ground—so you can get right down to ground level. And get one with a real removable all-metal ball head, not the cheap plastic ball heads on some. The height is not that important, but mine extends to about 15 inches, which gives me a variety of angles. I have not found it necessary to turn off Steady Shot when using the little tripod, despite what Sony says.

When working low, pull out the LCD and angle it up so you can see.

Practice placing your focus point in the most effective spot. Where do you want the sharpest focus to be? You can do this by simply touching the screen to move the Flexible Movable Spot where you need it to be, or by rocking the joystick control.

Pay attention here. When pulling out and angling the LCD, it is very easy to touch the edge of the screen and accidentally move the focus spot to one edge or one corner. Always check where it is before pressing the shutter. Return it to where it is supposed to be by pressing the center button of the 5 way control, or by touching the LCD.

Don't forget that on the Sony RX10 V, you have an actual aperture ring on the lens. If you need more depth of field, twist the ring toward the larger numbers. If you are willing to sacrifice some depth of field for higher shutter speeds or especially for lower ISO, move the ring toward the smaller numbers. Don't forget to put it back to f/8 when you are done. The ring always overrides the camera's memory when in Aperture mode.

## Last words

With these 4 sets of modifications, or 4 custom shooting modes, you are pretty much covered for almost any nature photography opportunity. Make intelligent use of the 4 modes, and you will bring back consistently satisfying shots of birds and wildlife, insects, flowers, moss, mushrooms, and landscapes both grand and intimate. The Sony RX10 V is an amazingly capable camera. These modifications and tips are designed to help you get the most out of it.

Learning the buttons takes practice. You have to commit your button layout to muscle memory, so your fingers are in the right place almost before you make the decision to make a change. It is like playing a musical instrument, or driving a car. If you have to think about which button to press, often it will be too late.

And finally, there is no wrong way to do photography. I make suggestions based on my experience in the field with a variety of cameras and specifically with the RX10 V. What I recommend works very well for me. It will work for you as well, but you might not like the way it works. Hopefully in this process you will have learned some of the ways you might create your own custom shooting mode—or how to customize your own shooting methods to get the most out of this amazing camera. The whole point is to enjoy the experience of taking photos of the nature you love—and, of course, to bring back satisfying images that you are inspired to share.

Let the camera do what it does well, and you do the parts only you can do. That is the Point and Shoot method for nature photography.