



The Hart Beat



First published March 1, 2015... Contact Hart at hartrufe@gmail.com



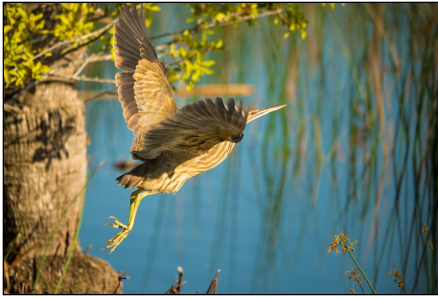
While photographing any bird in flight takes patience, some are easier to capture than others.

BIRDS IN FLIGHT



Man has always been intrigued by (envious of, jealous of?) birds ability to fly. While man, early on, learned to lift off the ground by virtue of lighter than air means, and after the Wright brothers, heavier than air means, neither of those forms of locomotion was, or is, the same as being able to flap or wave your arms and achieve "liftoff." I remember a television commercial years ago in which observers watched an enterprising young man haul a set of homemade "wings" to a bridge, attach them to his arms and leap into the air. In wonderment they exclaimed, "He can fly!" As he soared out

Merlin



American Bittern



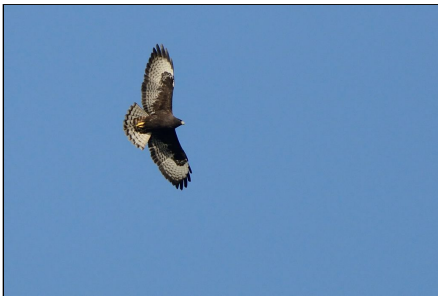
Reddish Egret



Painted Bunting



Roseate Spoonbills



Short-tailed Hawk

over the river and slowly, inevitably, glided down to the water, one skeptic observed, "But he can't swim."

It is a testament to the power of commercials that I was not able to recall what was being advertised until I recently located the commercial on the internet; and once again, I have already forgotten the advertiser. But the image and lesson of the skit lives on. You can watch the commercial anew at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v17Yow2PfHw>.

Photographing birds in flight is a special challenge, all its own. While clicking a photo of a sitting or standing bird is a relatively simple and common experience, even for someone armed with nothing more than a cell phone camera, coordinating all the requirements of focus, aperture, shutter speed, ISO, and exposure of the camera, with the required tracking and panning of the bird, can be a very daunting task. The largest birds, with their frame filling size and fairly steady flight patterns, and the smallest hummingbirds, with their relatively stationary hovering, may be the easiest to follow and photograph in flight. But medium sized and smaller, erratic flying birds can be the most difficult to locate in the camera view finder, and keep there, and it takes considerable practice and experience to come home with decent flight shots.

Most birds in flight photographers have the iconic Bald Eagle soaring, or Great Blue Heron coming in for a landing, or gorgeous Great Egret gliding through the air, photos, and I have been fortunate to have secured many of those shots as well. However, for the purpose of this article I have chosen less common subjects to illustrate some of the different types of birds in flight photography. Birds at the moment of taking flight, such as the Merlin and American Bittern shown here, or just pretending to take flight while in fact actually seeking food, such as this Reddish Egret, or when released after banding, such as this Painted Bunting, can be photographed by patiently watching the bird and waiting until the very moment it takes flight, and then snapping the camera shutter feverishly.

Artistic groupings of birds, like the Roseate Spoonbills here, or relatively rare or uncommon birds, such as the dark phase Short-tailed Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, Osprey with a fish, and White-tailed Kite depicted, are often just a matter of serendipity and good luck.

Smaller birds, such as the almost impossible to photograph Belted Kingfisher, gulls and terns, i.e. the Bonaparte's Gull and Caspian Tern shown here, and shorebirds and ducks, here the Lesser Yellowlegs, Marbled Godwit, Killdeer and Blue-winged Teal, are even more difficult to photograph. But the smallest birds, as in: Barn Swallows, Purple Martins and Vermillion Flycatchers, and a diving female Red-bellied Woodpecker, take the "most difficult to photograph" prize.

Finally, while many photographers have frame filling photos of clouds of Snow Geese and Canada Geese, I have chosen two photos: of Red Knots over the ocean; and a horde of Tree Swallows over a Port St Lucie lake; to illustrate the impact of a large number of birds in flight, even though individual birds might not be well depicted. And in conclusion for bird photos, a relatively easy female Ruby-throated Hummingbird (males are harder to get) on an iconic Cardinal Flower. And as you can see, I still have room to improve my images in all these categories, but as my sons would most likely tell me, "You're making headway."

In my lifetime I have seen remarkable technological advances that were never dreamed of in the days of my



Pererine Falcon

youth. However, it is still very hard for me to conceive of the possibility that one day man will be able to flap his arms and fly like a bird. In addition, as the commercial ended, "But he can't swim," I am reminded that there are many birds that "fly" under water in pursuit of fish or other organisms, yet I am not aware of any photographers making an effort to get photos of those birds in flight. Don't look at me! I'm not going to start THAT genre of birds in flight photography. I'm still working on doing pull-ups (unsuccessfully), and that is as close as I will ever get to flying without external assistance. For excellent background and instructions on Birds in Flight photography, see:

<http://www.uglyhedgehog.com/s-112-1.html> (3/1/15)

Click photos for larger versions