

Early on Damon and I talked about the use of multiple high-speed strobes and then moved onto colour, composition and elements. Years ago I would spend upwards of 40 hours a week in the bush in order to photograph birds with the goal of showing the nest, eggs, food, an adult, and the odd time both parents in a single frame. I called each object an element and was very happy if I was able to capture as many as three elements in a single photograph. I've always challenged Damon to "push the envelope" and try to add three or more "elements" to a single frame.

Most of the photographs in this book have at least two elements and a few have four. There is the portrait of the American Golden Plover (Page 45), for example. It has the parent bird incubating an egg and brooding one young—three elements. But there is actually a fourth element: the adult bird's mandibles are snapping at an annoying gnat—an element that was discovered only after Damon's return home. The Say's Phoebe photo (Page 64) captures the nest, the young, both parents, and an insect with camouflaging colours identical to the birds' colours. Damon's Hermit Thrush photo (Page 28) managed to capture both parent birds in focus and in full flight entering and exiting the nest. What makes this book especially interesting to me is the sheer number of images with multiple elements.

The images in this book were taken in British Columbia, the Yukon, and the Northwest Territories. The Yukon is not called the "Land of the Midnight Sun" without good reason—the 20-plus hours of light per day resulted in Damon's often spending 12-hour days in a blind working photo opportunities. His images result from an intimate knowledge of the subjects coupled with opportunity that comes with long hours spent in the field; it was not unusual for him to take more 1,000-plus digital images of a single set-up—an almost unheard-of number with film cameras only a few years ago. Damon's bird portraits will appeal to anyone with the least interest in nature. Not only do the images show the many birds in every detail of

their natural beauty, they also allow us a fascinating glimpse into the life of birds and their caring for their young.

Damon used my antiquated and problematic three-head high-speed strobe system manufactured by A. Kenneth Olsen of St. Paul, Minnesota, back around 1980. Over the years I improved the system by adding barn doors (like blinkers on a horse's headgear) to prevent glare or unwanted light from the backlight strobe that gives rim lighting to the subjects—and by lengthening the cords. Because Damon often worked in wet conditions, I insisted that he place white translucent shopping bags over the large 8"-diameter bulbs. By fluke, the translucency from the bags gave beautiful soft wrap-around lighting devoid of harsh shadows of the subjects.

Damon took all of the bird portraits for the book while staying in Dawson City, Yukon, between May 5 to September 12, 2004, and Chemainus, British Columbia, between May 23 to September 12, 2005. He met John C. Eriksson, of Houston, Texas, another bird photographer, while working in the Yukon in 2004 and collaborated with him in May 2005 in Burns, Oregon. Unfortunately, their time together was too early in the season for nesting birds with young and the high-speed strobes consistently malfunctioned.

Damon, a high school teacher and also an accomplished actor, makes his home in Port Coquitlam, British Columbia.

Donald E. Waite
Maple Ridge, BC, April 2006



Set-up for photographing the Hermit Thrush near Dawson City in the Northwest Territories.

INTRODUCTION

I waited in my blind, surrounded by the quiet forest. Directly in front of me was a tiny hummingbird nest, saddled on a drooping cedar branch. The two young chicks, near to fledging, peered out with bright eyes as they waited to be fed. I heard her before I saw her—a sharp little buzz, a series of quick chirps, and suddenly the female Rufous Hummingbird was hovering above the nest, resplendent in her emerald colour. Instinctively, I triggered the shutter, and the soft pop of my strobes illuminated her for an instant. It was a breathtaking shot—the bird in full flight, her young beneath her—a shot that had taken over fifteen years of hard work to be realized.

I was a bird photographer at last.

The seeds were planted along the way as I grew up. I can remember my grandfather taking me to Ambleside Pond in West Vancouver to feed ducks, pigeons, and blackbirds when I was five. My mother would also take me out to watch ducks, and I could even identify a few with my Peterson Field Guide. My father took me to Vancouver's Stanley Park to feed squirrels, and it was there that the occasional Black-capped Chickadee would land on my outstretched palm. Although I always liked all animals, as a young boy I preferred the kinds of creatures one could readily capture and examine closely—newts, salamanders, frogs, toads, lizards, snakes, and turtles all held my interest simply because I could catch them.

My fascination with reptiles and amphibians shifted in 1990 when I enrolled in a course offered by Richard Cannings, then the curator of the