



Shoot for the Moon

Monthly news and tips from
Landscape Photographer
Gill Moon

October 2020 Vol 10 - Woodland Photography

Hello

and welcome to the October edition of 'Shoot for the Moon'

With autumn just around the corner and the leaves beginning to change colour on the trees I thought this would be a good time to talk about woodland photography. Suffolk is blessed with some amazing and varied woodlands. They are some of my favourite areas to explore with the camera but they are not easy habitats to photograph successfully so in this issue I will talk about how to approach woodland photography and give you a few hints and tips to try out this autumn.

I hope you will find issue 10 interesting and informative. I am always keen to receive feedback so please get in touch if you have anything you would like to share.

Remember to aim high, be inspired and shoot for the moon! Thank you and happy photographing

Gill

If you would like to get in touch please email me at gill@gillmoon.com

Woodland photography



A stormy afternoon at East Lane Bawdsey. This image uses a 0.6 ND graduated filter and a 6 stop ND filter which enabled me to create a foreground which is all about colour and texture.

Photographing woodlands is one aspect of landscape photography that many of us struggle with. By their very nature woodlands are chaotic places with lots of elements arranged in haphazard ways. This natural chaos can be hard to simplify and successful images may, at times, seem impossible.

On a more positive note woodland photography is great for creating unique images and it is unlikely that you will replicate anything that another photographer has already captured. There are no iconic views or honeypot locations and the images you make will be your interpretation of the landscape. I think this is why I enjoy this type of photography so much - it is such a rewarding way to put your unique photographic stamp on an area.

Get to know an area

All areas of woodland are different. In Suffolk we have a good mix of coniferous plantations and deciduous woods. We also have some beautiful areas of ancient woodland which are well worth exploring.

The first thing you should do before reaching for your camera is to identify your chosen woodland and then get to know the area. Take a walk and identify some of the trees. The species present will determine the style of woodland and the density of the planting. Areas like Rendlesham, Tunstall and Dunwich forests were planned as commercial woodlands just after the Second World War. They are principally pine plantations but are becoming more diverse as trees are harvested and new planting is allowed to grow.

Pine plantations are characterised by long straight rows of trees and are often quite dark places. The vegetation is often very uniform. In some ways these areas are less chaotic but they can also be less rewarding in terms of the images you can capture.



This image shows the pine plantations of Rendlesham Forest with their uniform planting and straight rows of trees. Since this image was taken in October 2019 these trees have been harvested and this area of woodland is no longer here.

Shooting info: Nikon 24-70mm lens at 26mm F16 at 0.6 second, ISO 400, polarising filter.

Compositions using leading lines work well in these habitats with the paths and straight uniform planting adding depth to an image. In these examples the images are all about uniformity and lines with colour and texture adding to the interest.



This image shows the pine plantations around Rogie Falls in Scotland. Shooting info: Nikon 24-70mm lens at 70mm, F16 at 0.3 seconds, ISO 100.

Deciduous woodland is much more chaotic and unorganised and you have to work much harder to get a cohesive uncluttered image. Often in these cases it helps to focus on smaller areas and try to simplify the shot as much as possible.



This image shows an area of silver birch behind Staverton Park. There were numerous trees in this small area but by focusing on a few individual trunks and working with the sunlight and shadows I have distilled a rather chaotic scene to a few elements.

Shooting info: Nikon 70-200mm lens at 200mm, F14 at 0.4 seconds, ISO 100, polarising filter.

Experiment with lenses

When I first started photographing woodlands I saw the process as an extension of my other landscape photography and immediately reached for my 24-70mm lens. However I soon discovered that some of the best images could be obtained by using a longer focal length and I began to find that my 70-200mm lens was the one I reached for first.

Telephoto lenses

These have the effect of compressing a scene and they also give you a narrower band of focus. You can use both of these to your advantage in the woods to help simplify your view and isolate particular elements within your frame.



This image was taken in part of Upper Hollesley Common. It was shot with my 70-200mm lens at 200mm. Shooting Info: F5.6 at 1/8 second. ISO 100, polarising filter.

In the image above I chose a shallow depth of field to help blur the farthest elements in the background. I focused just beyond the front trees. The image is essentially about vertical lines with some lovely splashes of colour where the light is falling on the silver birch leaves.

Wide angle lenses

These are great for incorporating some really prominent foreground features into your images. They tend to introduce an element of distortion but this can either be removed in post processing or embraced as part of your image.

I chose to use a wide angle lens for the following image because I wanted to emphasise the bulbous nature of the tree roots. By getting close to the tree and choosing a low viewpoint I was able to make the base of the trunks the most prominent feature of the image.



This image was taken in Staverton Thicks. It was shot with my 14-24mm lens at 14mm. Shooting Info: F14 at 1.3 seconds, ISO 100

Macro Lenses

Woodland photography wouldn't be complete without focusing on some of the smaller details that are around. Look for leaves, seeds, fruit and fungi and focus on colours, shapes and textures.



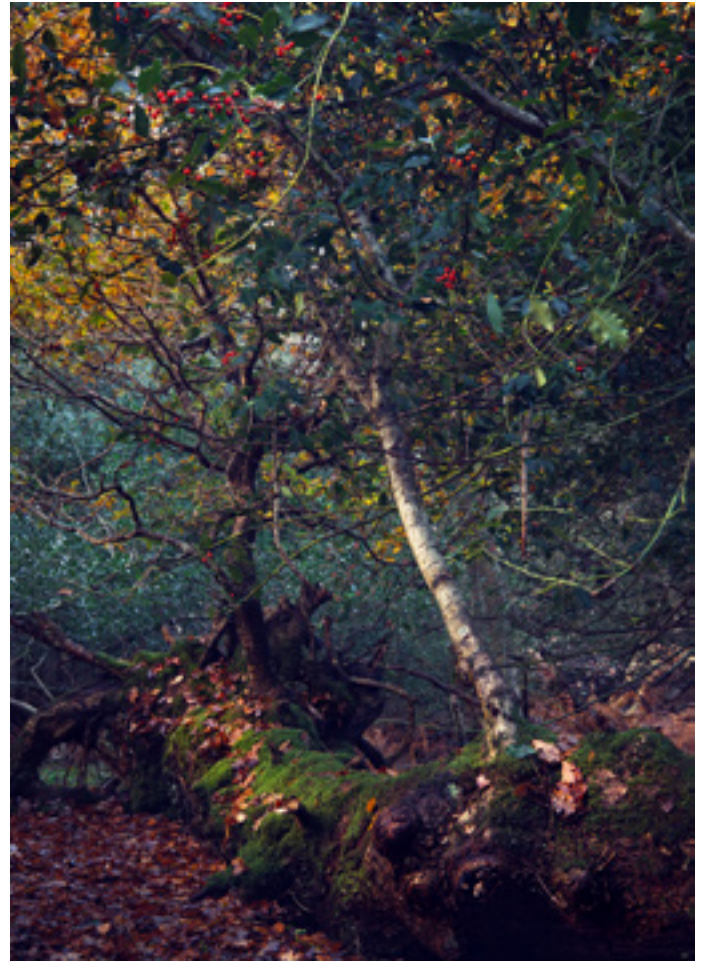
Weather and lighting.

Woodland photography is something that will yield great results whatever the weather but some of my favourite conditions to shoot in are mist and drizzle. These may not sound that enticing but mist is brilliant for simplifying a woodland scene. The reduced visibility helps to obscure some of the clutter and the brighter areas help draw the eye into an image.



This image was taken on Upper Hollesley Common It was shot with my 70-200mm lens at 70mm. The mist helped reduce the visual impact of the distant trees and emphasised the small group of silver birch at the heart of the image. Shooting Info: F16 at 0.8 seconds, ISO 400, polarising filter.

Some of my favourite times to venture into the woods are on rainy days - just a small amount of drizzle has the effect of saturating the colours and is particularly effective in the autumn. The reduced visibility that often comes with drizzle also works like mist and obscures some of the chaos within a forest scene.



This image was taken in staverton thicks on a rainy day. I used a polarising filter to reduce the glare from the leaves and enhance the colour of the foliage. Shooting info: Nikon 24-70mm lens at 52mm. F14 at 6 seconds, ISO 100.

Shooting in the middle of the day is possible although try to avoid harsh sunlight as it produces a huge dynamic range which can be a challenge to expose for. Areas of dark shadow and bright highlights will create an image full of contrast which may obliterate some of the detail you are seeking to portray.

Shooting into the sun can create some of the most dreamy effects possible within woodland photography. The technique works well with wider scenes as well as smaller details.

Look for trees that are covered in rain or early morning dew. If shot into the light at a wide aperture eg. F2.8 the raindrops will create beautiful bokeh which can give rise to very dreamy images.



This image was shot into the sun on a frosty morning. The thawing frost on the branches of the tree created some lovely bokeh from the out of focus highlights. Shooting info: Nikon 24-70mm lens at 70mm. F2.8 at 1/1600 second, ISO 400, handheld.

Composition

Before I talk about composition it is worth emphasising that in my opinion you will get the best results from woodland photography by using a tripod. Woodlands can be dark spaces and longer exposures may be necessary to get the shot at the required depth of field.

When looking for compositions try to find some order in the chaos. Look for interesting shapes, trees that have twisted trunks, arching branches or eye catching bark patterns.

Use leading lines - paths through the trees, fallen logs, or areas of shadow or colour.

Look for areas of sunlight and make these a focal point within your image.

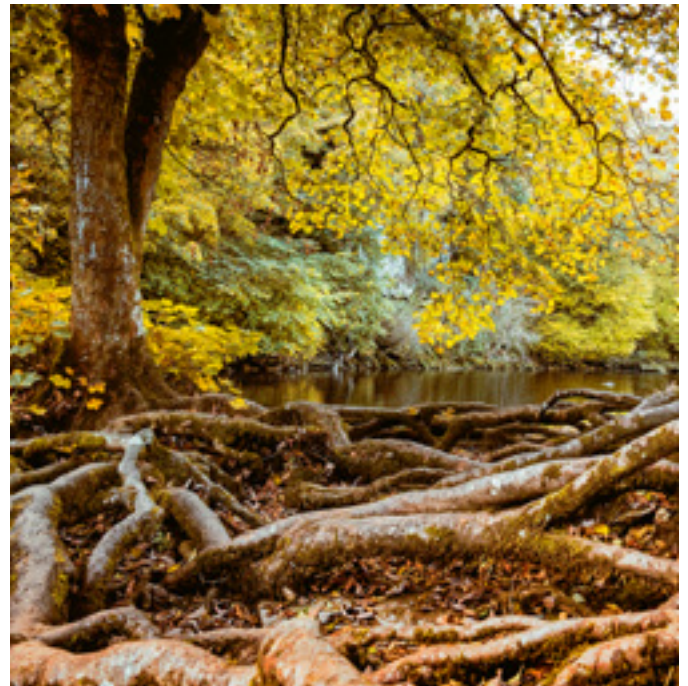
When approaching composition think about what caught your eye? What are the relationships between the elements in the scene? What is your point of view and if you change it will your image be more successful? Look for bold shapes, contrasting elements and element that stand out from their

surroundings.

Think about depth of field and how to use this creatively – front to back sharpness is not always necessary in woodland images.

Try eliminating the sky from your image. This will be the brightest part of the scene and can often be distracting. I very rarely include the sky in my woodland images.

The two images below are composed using the tree shapes as their principal elements.



Shooting Info: Nikon 24-70mm lens at 24mm. F6.3 at 1/80 second at ISO 800 handheld.



Shooting Info: Nikon 70-200mm lens at 70mm, F16 at 0.8 seconds, ISO 100, polarising filter.



Shooting Info: Nikon 70-200mm lens at 82mm, F5.6 at 1/160 second, ISO 800, handheld.

The image above focuses upon a silver birch tree and the contrast between its bright leaves and the dark background of the pine forest. To exaggerate this effect I have reduced the saturation of the green in the pine trees and the russet of the bracken in post processing. This ensures the silver birch stands out as the prominent feature in the frame.

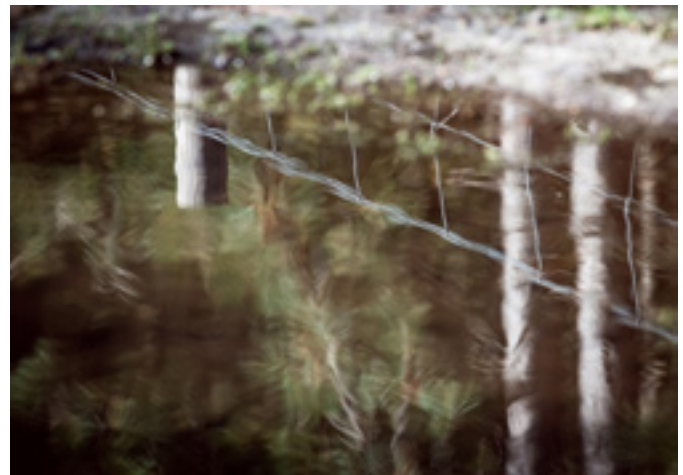
The next image focuses on a bright patch of light as its subject. I wanted to emphasise the dark nature of the woodland and shooting along a path towards the light seemed to capture the mood I was after. Again I have slightly desaturated the surroundings in post production and darkened down the shadows a little.



Shooting Info: Nikon 70-200mm lens at 98mm, F8 at 1 second, ISO 100, polarising filter.

Getting Creative

The more you look around a woodland scene the more you will notice and sometimes it is the quirky scenes that are most interesting. The image below was taken using the reflections in a puddle. There were slight ripples on the water which gave the reflection a softer feel which I really liked.



Shooting Info: Nikon 70-200mm lens at 200mm, F6.3 at 1/400 second, ISO 400.

Other effects that work really well in the woods include Intentional Camera Movement (ICM) and multiple exposures.

ICM

This is a method where you select a slowish shutter speed of about a second or longer, then move the camera whilst the shutter is open.

This gives streaks of colour and a blurred effect. You may need to use a ND filter or a polariser to give you a slow enough shutter speed.

The beauty of this technique is that it is mainly down to trial and error. The type of movement you use will effect the final outcome but it is often a case of repeating the process until you get something you like. As well as horizontal and vertical movements try a sharp shaking motion or a circular movement for slightly different effects.

The image below shows ICM at Westonbirt Arboretum. There was enough movement in this image to create a soft slightly painterly feel but enough structure has been retained to make the elements recognisable.

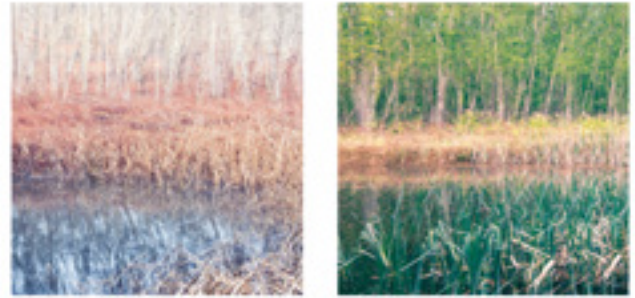


Shooting Info: Nikon 70-200mm lens at 70mm, F22 at 1.3 seconds, ISO 100, polarising filter.

Multiple exposures

These can be done in camera or afterwards by blending images together in post processing.

The first images were taken in camera at Captains Wood. They were made up of a series of three images for each shot, moving the camera slightly between frames. This has created a painterly feel but it is still possible to discern what the various elements are. Like ICM this technique requires trial and error and you will probably throw away more images than you keep.

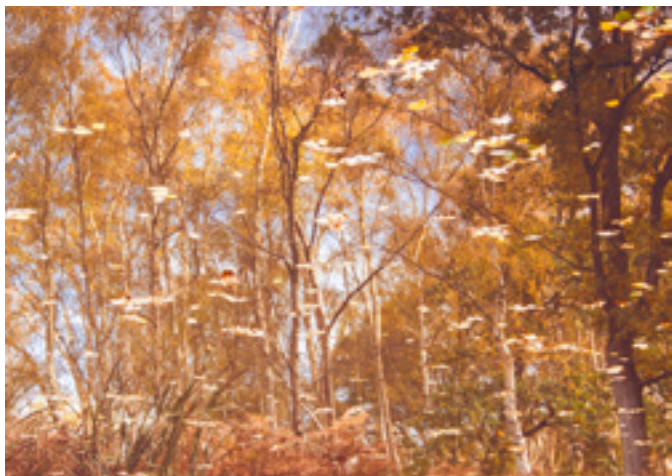


Multiple exposures can also be done in Photoshop by blending various images together. The image below was created using 4 different images blended one at a time using the soft light blend mode at different opacities. I picked a range of shots taken from the same plant and used some to create textures and others to show the plant itself.

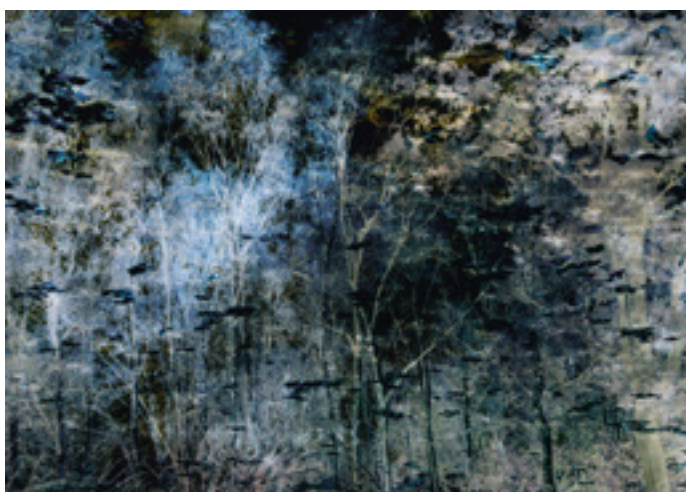


Your blended images don't have to look realistic - this technique is all about creativity. The two images on the next page show a shot of reflections I took at Captains Wood. I subsequently blended this shot with a textured image of some rust to create the second more creative image of the pond reflections.

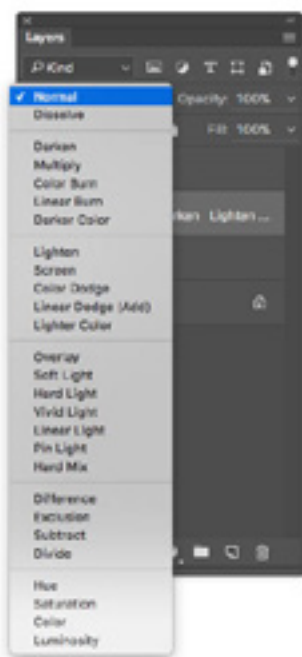
When playing with blend modes for the first time it is best to experiment. There are 27 different blend modes in Photoshop and it is worth scrolling through each to see the effect they have on the images you are working with.



Original image



Blended image



Photoshop Blend Modes

Post Processing

When thinking about post processing your woodland images try to have a vision in your head of your finished image so that you know what you want to achieve. The images below were all taken at Staverton Thicks. I wanted to convey the Tolkienesque feeling of the woodland by enhancing the painterly feel of the images. I kept the colours fairly desaturated and used some split toning in lightroom to enhance the feeling of antiquity.



Tips for post processing.

1. Tight crops work well with many woodland images. Try to eliminate the sky as much as possible.
2. Work to bring out the shadows in your tree trunks and in the foliage.
3. Work with the luminosity of individual colours by playing with the sliders.
4. Increased clarity can work well for foreground subjects but I find that reducing the clarity in many of my woodland images gives a softer more dreamy effect. The **Orton effect** is also widely used in woodland images and is explained here: www.naturettl.com/how-to-perfectly-post-process-your-woodland-images
5. I don't like heavily saturated colours in my images (which is personal taste) and I often desaturate my greens.
6. Split toning, which assigns a different colour to the highlights and shadows can work well for enhancing the mood of a woodland image.

Inspiration

Lars Van de Goor is a Dutch landscape photographer who's work focuses on the trees of his native Gelderland. His images have a magical dream like quality to them and are worth looking at for technique and composition www.larsvandegoor.com

Ellen Borggreve is one of my favourite woodland photographers. Her work seems to capture the mood of the forest perfectly. She also offers courses and Ebooks in woodland photography www.ellenborggreve.com

October's challenge

October is a fantastic time to get out into the woods with the camera. Here are a few ideas to get your creativity flowing.

Take the following images:

1. A woodland scene that excludes the sky
2. A scene that uses leading lines
3. A more intimate scene that focuses on a single subject
4. A subject framed by its surroundings

5. A detail image that focuses on a small element

6. A shot into the light

7. An image that is all about light and shadow.

I am really happy to offer feedback and would love to see your images so please get in touch gill@gillmoon.com



New Workshops



Additional Staverton Thicks Workshop Saturday 25th October 9am - 12 midday

By request I have introduced another half day workshop in the magical woodland of Staverton Thicks.

This Workshop will include a series of exercises to help you master the different aspects of composition and help you create beautiful and compelling woodland images in one of the most enchanting areas of woodland in Suffolk.

www.landscapephotographytuition.co.uk



Felixstowe Sunrise Workshop

**Sunrise and morning workshop 7am – 1pm
Saturday 28th November.**

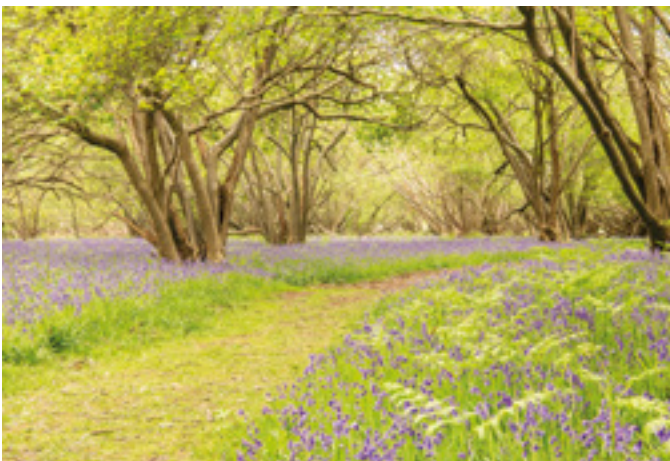
Taking in 3 very different landscapes within the Suffolk coastal town of Felixstowe:

Sunrise at Landguard Point

Long exposures at Cobbold Point to coincide with high tide.

Compositional techniques at Felixstowe Ferry working around the boatyard at the mouth of the River Deben.

www.landscapephotographytuition.co.uk



Spring Woodlands Workshop

Saturday May 1st 2021 9am – 12 midday

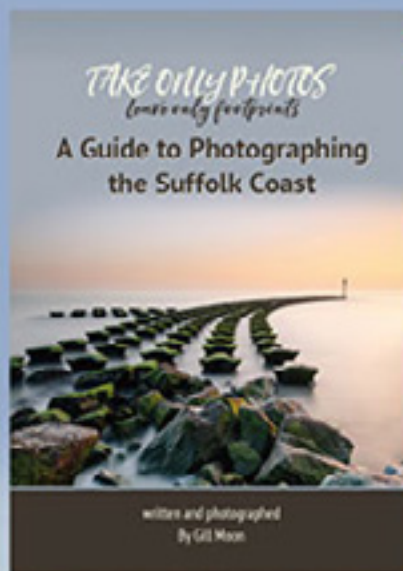
This woodland workshop takes place in Captains Wood, Sudbourne and is timed to coincide with the bluebell display.

The session is suitable for all camera types and abilities and is all about composition and seeing an image. We will be working with wider landscape shots and smaller details focusing on the bluebells and their woodland surroundings.

www.landscapephotographytuition.co.uk

Suffolk Guides

from Gill Moon Photography
£8 each



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