

Gill Moon Photography Photo Club

October 2023 Challenge 8

Woodland

Hello

and welcome to my monthly photo club challenges.

Each month I will be setting a new challenge for club members to work with. The challenges are not designed to be competitive but they are designed to be fun and inspiring and help you grow as a photographer.

During these challenges we will be looking at the work of different photographers who are 'masters' in their chosen field of photography. We will examine how they make their images and discuss how you can use their techniques in your own work. I hope these will be inspiring sessions.

Every monthly challenge will be followed by a 1.5 hour Zoom session (which is entirely optional) on the last Wednesday of every month where we will discuss some of the submitted images and talk about what worked and what didn't. I hope this feedback will be useful.

Thank you very much for being part of the Photo Club and I hope you will find it a fun and rewarding challenge.

Gill.

Creative Woodland Photography

This month's challenge is all about creative woodland photography.

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.

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

Weather and lighting.

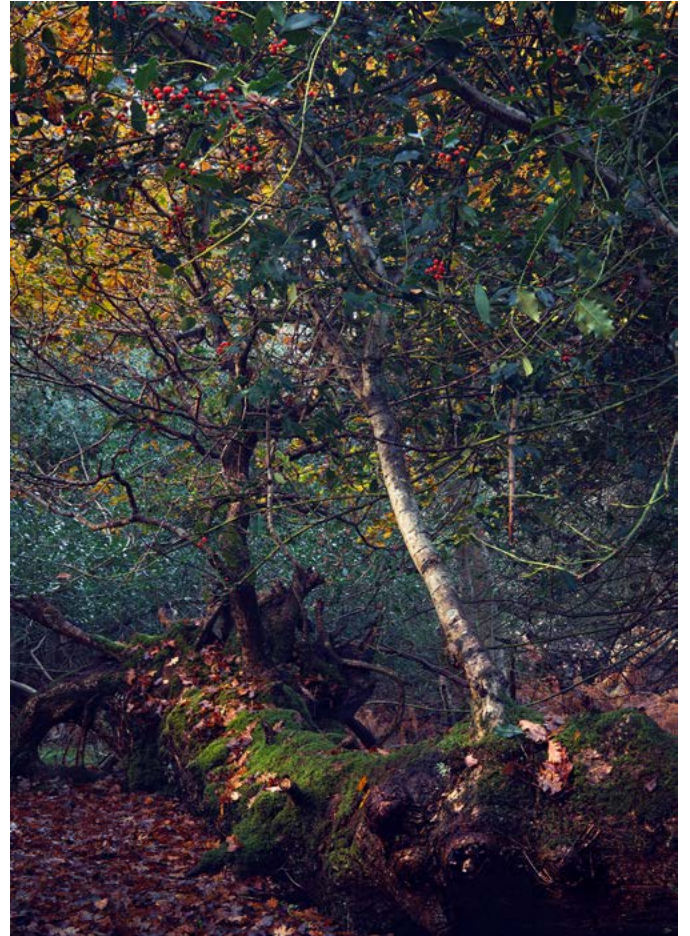
Woodland photography is something that will yield great results whatever the weather but some of my favourite conditions to shoot in are mist and drizzle. These may not sound that enticing but mist is brilliant for simplifying a woodland scene. The reduced visibility helps to obscure some of the clutter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

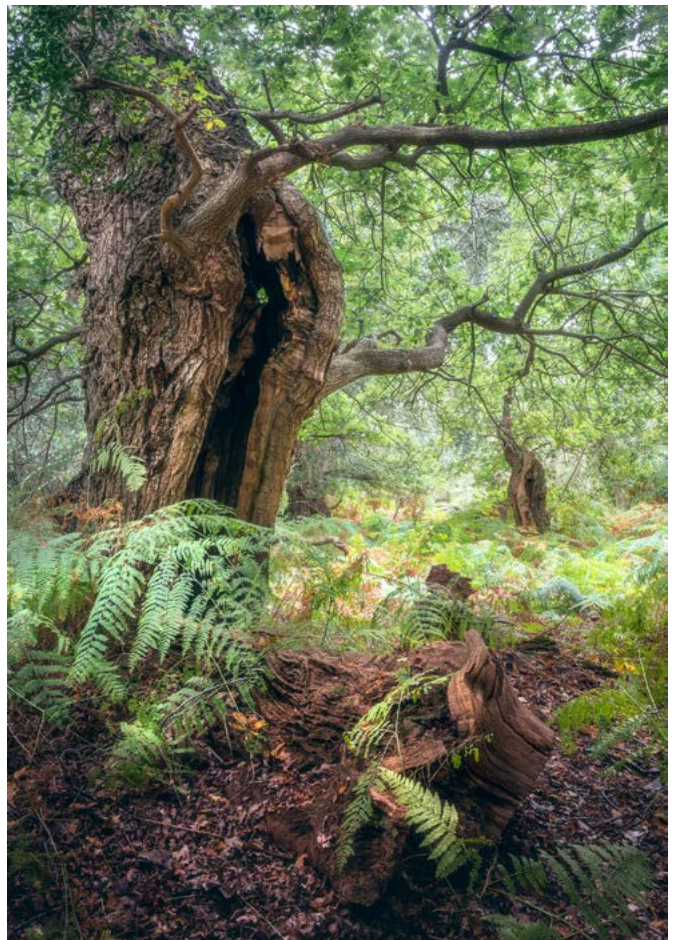
Look for areas of sunlight and make these a focal point within your image.

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.



This image was taken on a fairly overcast day in Staverton woods. There is some diffused light coming through the foliage. Shooting info: Nikon 24-70mm lens at 24mm, F16 at 1.6 seconds, ISO 100 using a tripod.

In the image above I have used the foreground tree as my subject and the branches of this to frame the background tree. The progression of trees through the frame give the image its depth and I have tried to keep the composition simple by eliminating other surrounding tree trunks.



This image was taken on a fairly overcast day in Staverton woods. There is some diffused light coming through the foliage. Shooting info: Nikon 70-200mm lens at 70mm, F11 at 1.3 seconds, ISO 100 using a tripod.

For this image I have used the curved tree trunks to create a tunnel effect which pulls the eye into the frame. I have incorporated the two outer tree trunks to anchor either side of the frame and help contain the eye within the middle part of the image. In post processing I have lightened the foliage at the end of the tree tunnel to help guide the eye to this point.



I decided to shoot this image of the tree stump because I was drawn to its shape, the beautiful green lichens that covered its surface edges and the holly berries in the background foliage.

This image was taken on a rainy day which has helped to saturate the colours and bring out the detail in the foliage. I used a polariser for this image to try and reduce the glare coming off the holly leaves in the background. This image was taken using a 70-200mm lens, at 70mm, F5.6 at 0.4 second, ISO100.

Smaller scenes

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.



FUNGI FINDS
Upper Hollisley Common

All the fungi shots that make up the panel above were taken with the telephoto lens using single shots. The depth of field for most is adequate to give a good image. The following shots of a beefsteak fungus were taken using the macro lens and here I have had to focus stack the images to make sure every part of the fungus was sharp.



Focus stacking

The two images above were taken using focus stacking. The one on the left was a 13 shot blend and the one on the right used 21 shots. They were both taken with a 105mm macro at F8.

When taking the images I tried to make sure I covered all the high and low points in the shot - as I was shooting with a macro lens the depth of field is very shallow even at F8.

My method for processing focus stacked images is as follows:

Set up a tripod and take a series of images with different focal points that will ensure sharpness across the whole frame.

Download the images into Lightroom and process one quickly to get exposure and light correct across the frame - don't crop yet.

Now select all the other images and 'sync' to apply all the processing corrections to all the images.

Open all the images as layers in Photoshop.

Select all the layers and go to Edit -> Auto Align Layers

Next go to Edit -> Auto Blend Layers. Select Stacking Images and check the box for Seamless Tones and Colours.

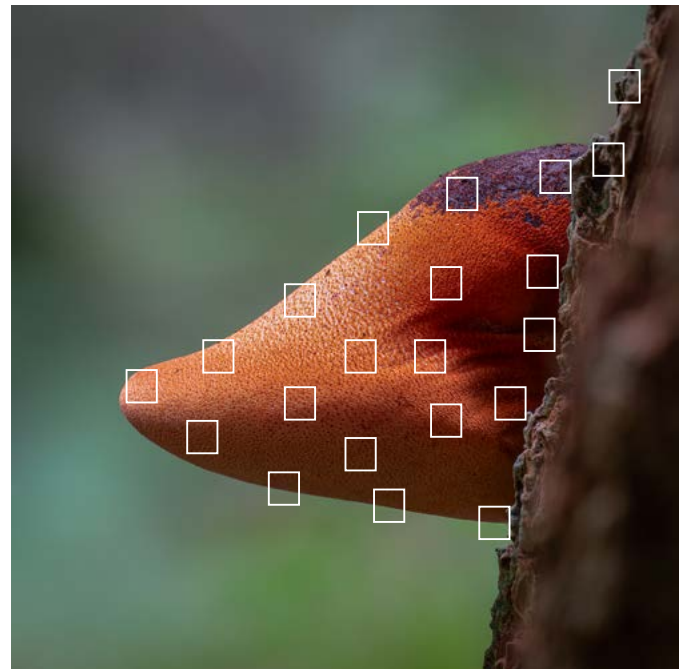
Photoshop analyses each individual pixel and selects only the sharpest ones from each image by revealing or concealing through

Layer Masks which will show up next to each layer.

When the masks are created, zoom in on the image to see if every area is sharp. Photoshop usually does a pretty good job but sometimes it is not perfect so please check really carefully and you may need to mask by hand for some images.

The image below gives you an idea of where I focused for each of the 21 shots that made up this image.

Using a macro lens it would have been impossible to get the whole fungus sharp in one shot even at F16 because the plane of focus on a macro lens is too shallow.



This is a focus stacked image of a beefsteak fungus. It was shot with a 105mm macro lens at F8. The shot shows the rough position of all 21 shots which were then blended in Photoshop to create the final image.

Post Processing

When thinking about post processing your woodland images try to have a vision in your head for your finished image so that you know what you want to achieve.

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

It is always a good idea to study other photographers work. The internet is a fantastic resource for learning and there are a host of inspiring photographers out there. Below are some examples of photographers who are well known for their woodland photography.

Simon Baxter

Simon is probably the best known woodland photographer in the UK today. His images have a beautifully soft feeling in terms of tone and colour. His compositions are often

really complex but work well because of the attention to detail.

Simon's works can be found at <https://baxter.photos> He can also be found on YouTube @ [SimonBaxterPhotography](#)

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

Octobers Photo Challenge

This months photo challenge is to produce two images:

1. a woodland scene - this can be anything that catches your eye, but the key is to simplify the area in front of you and to produce a composition that is visually appealing and guides the viewers eye through the frame.
2. a detail shot from within a woodland - this could be leaves, fruit, fungus - basically anything that involves looking closely at a subject. You can take this shot with a telephoto or a macro lens and it can be sharp across the frame or selectively sharp in one area only. Whichever you choose make sure you have a reason for doing so.

The Zoom session for this challenge will take place a little later this month, on Wednesday 8th November between 7pm - 8.30pm.

The final image on the last page shows an old tree stump with the patterns in the decaying wood. I have included the moss growing along the bottom edge because I liked the contrast in colour and texture.

