

[By Daniel J. Cox]

Nikon 200-400mm $f/4$ VR

Nikon has improved one of its most popular optics: the 200-400mm has been reborn. The zoom range on the 200-400mm $f/4$ G ED-IF AF-S VR Zoom-Nikkor is a huge asset to my wildlife photography, as it would be for sports shooters as well, but equally important is the constant $f/4$ maximum aperture and the inclusion of the new VR (Vibration Reduction) stabilization technology and the Silent Wave Motor, all at a reasonable 7.2 pounds.

On an assignment for the World Wildlife Fund to document the short-grass prairie of eastern Montana, photographing a sage grouse offered me an opportunity to run the lens through its paces. A blind is imperative when working with these birds, and it's from a stationary position that one comes to appreciate a zoom lens.

The zoom ring on the 200-400mm is easily rotated and the AF is lightning-fast and accurate. The combination of the lens and the



Nikon D2H performed flawlessly when the birds were strutting on the ground in front of me. When a golden eagle flew over, frightening dozens of birds into flight, the camera and lens showed what they were capable of. Action photography is tough from a blind due to lack of visibility. With the 200-400mm, I could pull back and get a wider view, allowing me to zero in on an individual flying right at the camera. With the D2H on 8 fps and Dynamic AF, I just tried to keep the bird in the viewfinder. The results were spectacular!

The new lens has several options. One includes an audible preset focus selection, a handy feature for sports and wildlife shooters. It allows for prefocusing on a specific subject such as a bird's nest. A quick touch of the AF activation button recalls the preset focus. Two options with VR are Active and Normal. Active takes into account the unique vibrations and movements when shooting from a moving vehicle, while Normal reads whether you've set the lens on a tripod and any panning activity.

When reviewing the camera's metadata, I had forgotten I had photographed the flight images with the Nikon TC-14E teleconverter attached. It was enlightening, to say the least—the lens and converter worked extremely well together. One last thing to remember is that the lens on a Nikon digital body with a magnification factor of 1.5x acts like a 300-600mm $f/4$; with the TC-14E, it becomes a 420-840mm. The in-flight images were shot at the equivalent of a 770mm 35mm lens. Simply amazing! Estimated Street Price: \$5,500.

Contact: Nikon, (800) NIKON-US, www.nikonusa.com.

[Primary Features]

- 1 **Ideal range** for working a broad array of wildlife and sports subjects
- 2 **Fast constant $f/4$ aperture** allows for action-stopping shutter speeds; keeps distracting backgrounds out of focus
- 3 **Coupled with a 1.4x teleconverter and D-SLR (1.5x magnification factor)**, the focal length equivalent is up to 840mm $f/4$ with excellent sharpness



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[Specifications]

Focal Range:
200-400mm
Aperture:
Constant $f/4$
Lens Construction:
24 elements in
17 groups
Size:
4.9x14.1 inches
Weight:
7.2 pounds
Filter Size:
52mm (rear mount)

The updated Nikon 200-400mm $f/4$ VR is a top-quality lens with a fast maximum aperture. The new optics are extremely sharp. Beware, however, as it's easy to accidentally engage the manual focus if you're wearing gloves or shooting on a beanbag support as Dan Cox discovered while shooting last winter.

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