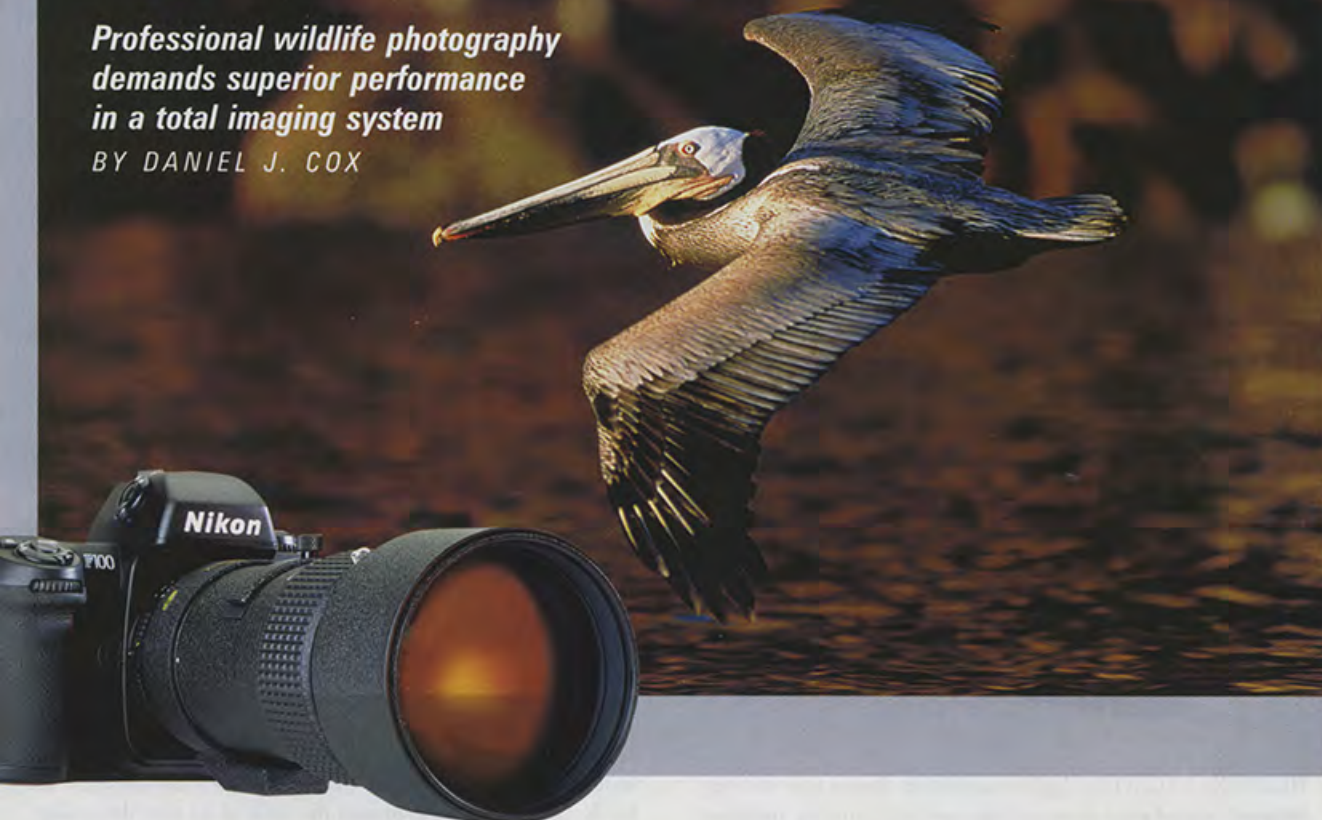


Right On Target

Professional wildlife photography demands superior performance in a total imaging system

BY DANIEL J. COX



Top, the Nikon F100 with AF Nikkor 300mm f/4 ED-IF; here, the AF Zoom-Nikkor 70-300mm f/4-5.6D ED and SB-28 Speedlight

I've been extremely fortunate in my life—traveling, photographing and seeing the world, and being able to combine my passions for photography and the outdoors into an occupation that most are only able to dream about. However, there are extremes that aren't quite so ideal, and most come under the guise of bad weather, dusty roads, pouring rain and frigid, below-zero temperatures. It's all part of the game, though. To help smooth out the bumps of frustration, I've always found benefit in working with equipment I can believe in and trust.

The cornerstones of Nikon products truly are durability, quality and ease of use. For example, take the Nikon F100, an incredibly solid camera. Like the F5, the F100 incorporates excellent features including "custom settings" that allow you to personalize how many of the camera's features operate.

I use the Dynamic Auto Focus all the

time. When photographing fast-moving birds, it's invaluable. The five-spot AF sensors work together to keep a speedy subject in accurate focus. As the subject flies along, I pan to stay with it, and the main AF sensor will transfer AF accuracy information to the next sensor in line. It

keeps me on target. With the five AF sensors working together, I benefit from a huge portion of the viewfinder acting as my target area.

The other option related to the focus modes is Spot AF. It's like having an in-the-viewfinder compositional aid. Left, right, top, bottom and center—it's all there for me to choose for my vision of a properly composed photograph. And it's speedy, too. The little AF thumb pad on the camera back is quick, efficient and effortless in allowing me to move to the five different AF zones within the viewfinder.

The AF start button on the back of the camera is set by way of a simple custom function feature, and it's engaged nearly 90% of the time on all my cameras. You really have to use this custom feature to appreciate how it works, but quite simply, it allows you to trigger the autofocus from the back of the camera without touching the shutter release.

The 3D Matrix metering system on the



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F100 is superb. How it's able to correct for certain situations that fool most meters I have no idea, but it does, and it does it well. And I never have to take my eye away from the finder to change the meter's settings—or any other feature of the F100, for that matter.

While I've used some extreme lenses lately, I'm finding myself wanting to reduce weight without sacrificing quality. Nikon has filled this niche with the new AF Zoom-Nikkor 70-300mm f/4.5-5.6D ED lens. I bought this lens mainly to reduce the weight of heavy optics while backpacking. The ED glass is what sold me, and I was amazed at the price since it included the finest glass Nikon makes. Another lens I've been using is the AF Nikkor 300mm f/4 ED. It's much lighter than my larger 300mm f/2.8, comes with the same excellent ED glass, incorporates a super-rugged design and is equal in sharpness to my larger 300mm,



but is much easier to carry. With the advent of superior quality films at higher ISOs, the 300mm f/2.8 days are getting fewer and farther between.

Even wildlife photography is all about light, and the Nikon SB Speedlights can make photos where they didn't exist before. I earn my living by squeezing every last photo out of whatever situation I'm in. Before the auto-balanced, fill-flash capabilities, a shoot would come to an end much quicker than it does now. Using Matrix-Balanced Fill-Flash can eliminate harsh shadows that appear two hours

after sunrise and two hours before sunset. Dark eye sockets are no longer a problem. I put on an SB Speedlight in these situations and shoot without care. Sometimes, I'll use flash compensation on the Speedlight to creatively change the amount of fill light the flash is putting out. Once again, I have infinite control over the system I'm working with.

For more information on the Nikon Total Imaging System, call 1-800-NIKON-US or visit www.nikonusa.com

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