

So You Want to Become a Photographer? How to Take Better Photos of Reptiles and Amphibians!



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Are you a pet owner, breeder or hobbyist, or even aspiring field herper looking for ways to better further and improve your photography skills and/or other ways of making one's animals, or finds "look better", so to speak? Then this educational article might be for you! Whether one is looking simply to better further their personal or professional development skills on their own, or for ways of more professionally promoting one's image and reputation when it comes to the animals one might be producing and/or offering for sale, particularly when posting on online websites or classifieds such as Kingsnake.com. FaunaClassifieds, MorphMarket, and other sites, upping one's game when it comes to good photography should be a must when it comes to being taken more seriously, or at least professionally! Furthermore, many of these same tips and tricks can be used or considered when it comes to photographing reptiles and amphibians in the wild while "field herping" as well! Once you have found that reptile or amphibian in the wild, what are the best ways to photograph them?

So how does one go about learning how to take better, higher quality images of their animals, and where does one start? What are the supplies and/or materials needed for getting started? As it turns out, one does not necessarily need to have a fancy and expensive camera and/or an entire professional photography studio in order to take better photos! Gone should be the days of "in hand" photos, or photos through glass enclosures when it comes to showing off and presenting one's animals, whether they be personal pets, or animals one might have bred and have for sale!

Unlike when it comes to photographing plants, or other stationary or inanimate objects, reptiles and amphibians, are of course, living, moving animals, which oftentimes might not always want to cooperate or to sit still on their own for one to be able to take good or decent photos of them. When it comes to live animals, **patience** is key, as well as having an understanding of the animal's movements and behavior when it comes to potentially being able to photograph them! As with

many subjects, there can be a huge array of different materials, methods, and styles one may prefer when it comes to photographing herptiles, as well as more intermediate to advanced techniques in doing so. Larger species of animals, as well as venomous and other potentially dangerous animals may of course require two or more people to safely handle and interact with, as well as considerably more training and expertise. However, for the purposes of this guide, the vast majority of relatively smaller, harmless, “common” species of pet reptiles and amphibians can be photographed using these tips and techniques.

However, for this article, we will be starting out with all of the basics one needs to know, and has to have in order to better their photography of these amazing animals! How can one get started while on a budget, or without needing to go out to buy a ton of fancy cameras or expensive equipment? What are some ways animals can be handled and interacted with in order to end up with a better photo of them? What should one do with their photos of their animals once they are taken, not to mention it being simply fun to have photos of one’s animals? All of these topics, plus more, will be covered in this educational article all about how to improve your photography when it comes to herps, wild and native, or our captive pets!

Materials Needed to Start Out With



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OR...



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- 1. Camera, of any make or model of one’s choosing. If one does not happen to have a camera which can be used for photography, do not necessarily fear! A modern cell phone with a built in camera can oftentimes do the trick! Many of the newer and upgraded cellphones which are manufactured out there, such any of the Android and iPhones phones, can have just as good of photo taking quality, the same or similar features, and settings as a regular camera!



© Amazon.com

- 2. One or two, 75 watt incandescent bulbs with domes or should. “Clamp-light” varieties will often work well for photography purposes as they can be adjustable, and do not need to be mounted directly overhead. These bulbs and domes will help illuminate and provide better lighting and visibility when it comes to photographing one’s animals more professionally.



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- 1. One stand of sufficient and appropriate size. This stand can be custom built with PVC, plywood, melamine, or just about any other material, or even be a folding table, or other table or similar piece of furniture large enough to work with and easy and spacious enough to easily place the animal onto in order to be photographed.



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- 1. Roll of Backdrop paper (Any color preferred). The amount of backdrop paper one needs, as well as its costs, and thickness will depend and vary on the paper width and how much paper one plans on using. Backdrop paper can also vary depending on the size and types or animals being photographed; however, for the most variety of species, a thicker backdrop paper should be used. Commercially available rolls of paper can often work well, but can also be a more expensive option. Conversely, plain white rolls of construction paper, or even simple printer paper (for smaller animals which will fit into frame on it), can also work well as affordable options as a backdrop. Likewise, a roll of, or custom-cut to size piece of plain colored fabric can also work as a backdrop, but can have more imperfections in the visible strands or fabric material than paper.

The backdrop paper can simply be draped over or across the table or other stand being used to create a simple yet professional look without any creases, and allows for a more seamless and professional presentation of and focus on simply the animal. Another thing to consider and keep in mind is the contrast of the animal with the backdrop material; a darker colored animal might not contrast or stand out as well on a darker backdrop, and likewise a lighter

colored animal might not stand out on a lighter colored backdrop.

- Optional: Sheet of Acrylic glass to give a potentially better mirror image, or more reflective surface to photograph on. Having this sheet of glass is not required for a good photo, but can still help add to the professionalism and style of the photo. These sheets of acrylic can be found on Amazon, or cut to size at local hardware stores.



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- 1. Camera lens cleaner or duster. Having a camera lens cleaner or duster to maintain clean lenses or any glass surfaces used can also be important in being able to take quality photos.



- Optional: 1 Photography stand of sufficient size, length and dimensions. While not essential, investing in an additional photo backdrop stand or kit can help add some additional backdrop support and accessories such as clamps, stands, or rolls for the dispensable construction paper or other backdrop material.

Composure and How to Handle Animals During a Photo Shoot!

When it comes to composure, and how to handle and interact with one's reptile or amphibian in being able to better photograph them, there are several considerations, tips, and tricks one can utilize. In most cases, it is preferable to have or be able to capture the animal's entire body inside of the frame or shot of reference, for optimal representation. It is also important to ensure that one's photos of the animal are not blurry or out of focus due to the animal suddenly jumping, running, or otherwise moving during the photo shoot. The methods one uses can depend on the species or type of animal one is working with

to photograph, as well as their individual temperaments and dispositions. However, these are several important tips for working with and handling animals for a photo shoot!



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- **Predict or Anticipate the Animal's Movements or Direction Ahead of Time.** While certainly not always predictable 100% of the time, predicting or anticipating the animal's movements and/or directions they are likely to take "into frame" can help one with taking better photos of them! One can also take out, and handle their animals to be photographed for several minutes prior to, or before the photoshoot in order to acclimate them to their surroundings or calm them down. Doing so may also tire or wear them out to become more manageable for taking optimal photos. One can also consider the "rule of thirds" when it comes to allocating and predicting space utilized by one's animal during a photoshoot for a more even and aesthetically pleasing photo.



© LLLReptile.com



© Focused Collection. "Hand-Cupping" Technique which can work well with many smaller reptiles and amphibians.

- **Cover or Provide Additional Cover or Objects for Your Animal.** Oftentimes, there are many additional tips and tricks one can utilize to encourage the animal to be photographed to calm down or to help make them feel more secure. Providing an adjustable or movable piece of driftwood or other three-dimensional object or furnishing for them to climb onto, perch on, or otherwise coil around to help them feel more secure. These objects certainly never hurt to be included in a photo, and can even add some more naturalistic components to one's photos.

For many smaller animals, one can simply cup one, or both of their hands over them for a minute or two to provide a dark, concealed "hiding place". Larger animals can also be guided or partially concealed using one's hands, or even a "hidebox", or other lightweight object they can fit into and/or under to pause their current course of direction. It is recommended, however, to already

know or be familiar with the individual dispositions of each animal, as using one's hands to guide or "cup" an unfamiliar animal, or an otherwise "aggressive" animal that is likely to bite, could be a way of ending up being bitten or nipped by an impatient animal. For more "aggressive animals" that are likely to bite, using one's hands to guide or manipulate them might not be as good of an idea. In these cases, one can use an appropriate length snake hook, or clear piece of plexiglass acrylic with a handle attached to guide the animal, rather than one's hands.

There can be several slight variations to this tip depending on the size and type of animal, and materials and methods used; however, the overall general idea remains the same in that they are being given an opportunity to hide and feel secure before and during the photo shoot, after the cover object is removed.



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- **Consider "In-Situ" Photos First.** "In-situ" photos are photos taken of an animal in their most natural settings, contexts, and/or positions prior to even being handled or disturbed at all. They are essentially animals "as found", or "as observed" as opposed to "ex-situ" photos. Taking in-situ photos first can often be a good way of ensuring a photograph is obtained, particularly while out field herping, of animals which may be faster moving and more difficult to catch, or even venomous or potentially dangerous animals which require more experienced and professional training or handling.

Likewise, one can also go for these types of more "in-situ" photos of their captive or pet animals, so long as any glass or other barriers impeding the visibility or viewability of the animal and/or quality of the photo itself can be removed without disturbing the animal. Taking in-situ photos can also be a great way of being able to capture more natural postures or behaviors of animals, in the wild or in captivity. Some wild reptiles, such as many aquatic turtles, can also be more wary and easily spooked or disturbed into diving into the water when approached too closely. In these cases, having a good zoom feature or tele-photo lense could also be helpful for making long distance shots. Some other herps can be tiny, so also having a good macro lens could also be beneficial for extremely small animals as well.

Post-Production! What to Do With Photos Once They Are Taken?

Once one has completed their photo shoot with their animal, or animals, and they have at least one, or

more decent quality photos, what can one do next with their photos? This is the step where photos can be edited, and any imperfections in the photo removed, cleaned up, or edited. Do not worry if this oftentimes ends up being the case until one becomes more apt at it! This is what the post-production step is for! That extra speck of dirt, or hair which shouldn't have been there can still be edited out in the post production process!

There are many different applications, or "apps" one can use for this process, some of which are free and downloadable, while others might need to be additionally purchased. However, with a paid subscription, one may have access to a wider array of editing tools and features than perhaps a free app. One may want to use these apps to increase or decrease their exposure levels, lighting balances, blending, and other features which can be used to improve and add the final "touch-ups" to one's photos.

One final tip when it comes to photography, or any new endeavor for that matter, is one may wish to consider "starting-small", so to speak. "Starting small" will help you to determine whether the field will be of further interest, and whether one may want to further purchase and invest in doing so. If, after this beginning tutorial, one decides photography is an area they would like to learn even more about and become more professionally involved in, that is great! You will now have the foundational tools and expertise in order to do so. If, however, one decides photography is not quite their thing when it comes to their animals, that is perfectly ok as well, as at least one now knows how to take better, more professional quality photos of their pets!

In either event, once one is satisfied and happy with the final product, your professional photo of your reptile or amphibian is now ready for display, or for any other use one might desire! Great job!



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