

Identifying the places and best settings where bugs or animals appear is the real key to taking stunning wildlife photos. Expert Philip Price puts Fiona in the picture.

Kneeling down on wet grass, peering into the undergrowth is not my normal approach to photography.

Yet I find myself enthusiastically hunting for the perfect bug to capture on film in a woodland area of grass, ferns and bluebells.

Around me on the shores of Loch Awe, I hear other would-be wildlife photographers making delighted discoveries of spiders, caterpillars, bees and stick insects.

After about 20 minutes, we are then allowed to pick up our cameras.

“Patience is the key to a good wildlife picture and good luck

Because for award-winning wildlife photographer Philip Price, of Loch Visions, of Kilchrenan in Argyll, it's the “finding and setting that makes a photo”.

He said: “The first thing I always do when taking wildlife pictures is to put down my camera.

“I might even visit the location

of possible photographs without taking my camera at all.

“Once I have quietly scouted out the area and seen where the wildlife makes an appearance, I'll then return with my camera in hand.

“This is the secret of taking the best wildlife photographs.”

Having identified a small orb web spider hanging beneath a curled fern frond, I prepare to set up the camera.

My first instinct is to stand above the spider and zoom in the camera lens as close as possible.

But Philip's recommends that I set up a tripod around a metre away and at the same height as the spider.

He advises me to “think carefully about the frame, background and sunlight”.

I then spend more time considering the settings of the complicated-looking SLR camera.

This would normally flummox me, but a couple of hours of basic camera

tuition that morning had prepared me for this very moment.

Philip's simplistic but unpatronising lesson revealed how a camera works and how to get the best from it for different subjects and conditions.

Until now I have only used my camera on automatic setting and had no idea how to manually adjust the aperture, shutter and lens.

Now, as I look through the viewfinder of the Nikon D50, I think about the amount of light required, the depth of field and the speed of the shutter.

I decide on a Macro setting and an aperture of F5.6, which is both a changer of light and depth of field.

I recall from the lesson that a smaller F-stop number means a larger aperture and, therefore, more light being allowed into the camera.

The F-stop also controls the focus at different depths.

For a shallow depth of field, I need a large aperture or a small F-stop.

For an optimum photograph in good light, and keeping the camera steady and focused on the spider's head, I

choose a shutter speed of 250ths of a second.

Finally – and nervously – I click the shutter button and take my first photo of the day.

After a few more snaps on this setting just to be safe, I make a couple of adjustments to the shutter speed, both slower and faster.

I am convinced the photos will be far worse than anything I could take on the fully automatic setting but Philip is more confident.

Looking over my shoulder at the photo replay on the camera, he said: “Wow. Amazing. That is such a beautiful picture.

“You will be pleased when you see that in print, I'm sure.”

I reserve further judgment and go back to the hunt for more insects to try out my new photo-taking skills.

At a nearby hide, I also have the opportunity to photograph voles and birds.

I realise that patience is the key to a good wildlife picture and good luck.

I capture a female chaffinch looking



WATCH THE WILD



**FIONA
RUSSELL**

