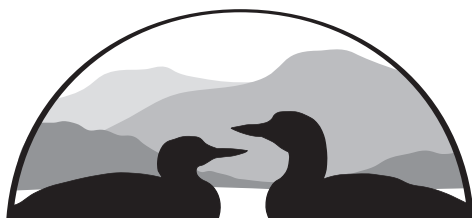


New Hampshire Bird Records



Summer 2009

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Cover Photo: Lawrence's Warbler, by Chris Sheridan, 6/17/09, Southwest Park, Nashua, NH.

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IN MEMORY OF
Tudor Richards
 FEBRUARY 16, 1915 – MARCH 6, 2009

We continue to honor Tudor Richards with this second of the four 2009 *New Hampshire Bird Records* issues in his memory.

Tudor Richards still doing what he loved at the age of 81: birding in the New Hampshire wilderness. Photo taken by Bob Quinn in June, 1996 as Tudor was overlooking the Great Gulf in the White Mountain National Forest.

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cold or hot or raining; however, you meet new people who share your interests and experience completely new things, such as seeing an adult nighthawk feeding a baby or hearing the low growling of a Whip-poor-will only a few feet away (which you still can't see!). Whether it's conducting an annual Breeding Bird Survey route, participating in Mountain Birdwatch, or observing Common Nighthawks and Whip-poor-wills, the extra effort makes a big difference and you're collecting valuable data that wouldn't be possible without you.

If you'd like to help with Project Nighthawk contact Becky Suomala, bsuomala@nhaudubon.org, 603-224-9909 x309; for Whip-poor-wills contact Pam Hunt, phunt@nhaudubon.org, 603-224-9909 x328.

Technology Series

An Overview of Digiscoping

by Leonard Medlock

Laurence Poh, recognized as the father of digiscoping, was an avid birdwatcher and an active participant of the Malaysian Nature Society. He often used a spotting scope to observe birds from a distance without alerting them and in 1999 he began using a Nikon CoolPix to explore digital photography. An experienced photographer, he realized that these “tools of the trade” could be combined, and digiscoping was born.

Laurence pioneered the technique now known as digiscoping or “digital camera scope photography.” Digiscoping is a method of using a digital camera through a spotting scope. All you need is a spotting scope, a steady tripod, a point-and-shoot (PS) camera with a 3-4x optical zoom, and (optionally) a mount to center the camera on the scope's eyepiece. Prior to digiscoping, photographers relied on cameras coupled to heavy (and expensive!) lenses. In digiscoping, the 3-4x optical zoom on most PS cameras, with a range of 35-140mm, plus the 20x magnification on the spotting scope translates to over 2000 mm magnification—just enough reach to photograph distant wildlife. The newest PS cameras sport an optical zoom greater than 4x, but most digiscopers seem to prefer the 3-4x optical zoom as it minimizes vignetting (vignetting is the dark circle that surrounds the viewing area in the eyepiece).

A digiscoping set-up is more portable and usually far less expensive than traditional photographic equipment, but it does have its limitations. For example, digiscoping flying birds can be nearly impossible since one would have to track the bird through the scope while viewing the bird through the camera's lens or LCD. What a challenge this would be to follow a swallow or a Merlin! Following and locking focus on a soaring raptor or feeding sandpiper can be tricky because the focus distance changes quickly. Still, I have seen many excellent photos taken with an inexpensive PS camera and a reasonably priced scope. Regardless, the main points are to enjoy taking photos, to appreciate the wildlife you're photographing, and to share your discoveries with friends and family.

Selecting the camera

Choose a digital camera that has an optical zoom of 3-4x and 6-8 megapixels (MP). If you wish to print 8x10 photos, then 10-12 MP (most inexpensive new cameras have 10 MP) should work nicely, and higher megapixels allow for more cropping. Bring your scope in the store along with your adapter or camera mount if you are using one. Yes, it may seem odd or uncomfortable to waltz into a store with your scope and tripod over your shoulder, but testing the digiscoping setup at this time may mitigate any setup troubles later in the field. The purpose of a mount or adapter is to center your camera over the scope's eyepiece. Some scope manufacturers make mounts designed to work with their scopes. These mounts are threaded so that they screw on to the camera or to the camera's conversion lens adapter, a threaded tube that permits the camera to accept telephoto lenses. I've seen homemade mounts that employ a hollowed-out lid of an aspirin bottle that work just as well, their primary function being to align the camera with the scope's eyepiece. A camera mount is not essential and many birders digiscope by simply handholding the camera close to the scope's eyepiece. Some prefer not to use a mount because it may compromise their birding since one would have to take time to attach the mount to the scope. However, sharp photos require a stabilized set-up and that means no camera shake. A slight wind or unsteady hand can increase blur. Image-stabilized (IS) cameras can compensate for camera shake but they cost more.

Test the camera's functionality in the store. Ensure that the camera's optical zoom, when viewed through the scope at 20x (more on that later), eliminates vignetting, the dark circle that surrounds the viewing area in the eyepiece. Simply increase the camera's optical zoom to confirm that the scope's image fills the LCD screen and that vignetting is eliminated. Also, verify that the camera's LCD is bright enough to view the image, that the camera mount (if using one) fits securely on your camera, and that the set-up is easy to attach and to remove. The following is a partial list of cameras that are good digiscoping candidates, as used and tested by some digiscopers who keep a blog of their photos:

Canon Powershot A590-IS (I use this one)

Canon Powershot A570-IS

Canon Powershot A640 (discontinued but may be available online)

Nikon Coolpix P5100 (discontinued but may be available online)

Nikon Coolpix P6000

Digiscoping Techniques

First, set your scope's zoom magnification to 20x or use a fixed 20x eyepiece; 30x or even 60x might be tempting, but more magnification may mean a decrease in light that reaches the camera's sensor. Set the camera's shooting mode to A (Aperture priority) which forces your camera to set the shutter speed automatically based on the aperture setting that you dial in to your camera. In good light, set your ISO to 100 and dial the aperture to f4-4.5 which allows much faster shutter speeds, like 1/800, to capture fast, rapid movements. In addition, it is best to disable your camera's digital zoom feature because higher magnification will decrease the amount of light reaching the camera's sensor. I use center-weighted or evaluative focus settings, since most cameras do a good job of sensing the lighting conditions and because the bird is usually in the center of the frame. In bright light, a low ISO setting from 50-200 will minimize in-camera noise, but

in overcast light, a slightly higher ISO at 400 may be necessary to maintain a fast shutter speed. Auto white balance is usually a safe bet. It's good practice to read your camera's manual to learn how to adjust your camera's settings for its optimal performance.

Attach the camera to the camera's adapter and then affix the adapter to the scope's optical lens, or if handholding the camera, be sure not to scratch the scope's eyepiece. Try to get as close as you can without disturbing the bird so that the bird fills the camera's frame. If you are a beginner, practice on House Sparrows or Mourning Doves; any backyard bird will do. It is helpful to keep the sun to your back to allow more light to reach the camera's sensor; more light means a faster shutter, which can freeze motion, and a smaller aperture (e.g., f4) yields more depth of field. Remember, to eliminate vignetting increase the camera's optical magnification, usually at about 3-3.5x, until the camera can no longer see the dark edges. Vignetting can also be cropped off later, at the expense of image size, to either magnify or center the image.



Photo of a Ring-billed Gull (circled in black) with a Canon PowerShot A590IS not attached to zoom eyepiece. Taken by Leonard Medlock at Exeter wastewater treatment plant.



Digiscoped photo of the same Ring-billed Gull with a Canon PowerShot A590IS attached to a 20-60 zoom eyepiece (20x used); Shutter 1/500, Aperture f/5.6; ISO 100; cropped to 900x600. Photo by Leonard Medlock.

Adjust the focus on the scope until the image appears sharp in the camera's LCD. Ideally, you'll want the bird's eye or face in focus. If the bird moves, adjust the scope's focus and recompose the shot. Press the shutter half way to lock focus and ensure the image in the LCD is sharp. That done, press the shutter fully (and smoothly) to take the photo. Don't be afraid to experiment with some of your camera's other settings, from Auto to Manual, to see which setting works for you. If your camera has a movie setting, try taking some video but remember that it will exhaust a considerable file size on your memory card. With some practice and patience, you may discover that digiscoping is a fun and inexpensive way to record and to share your discoveries in the field.

A list serve dedicated to digiscoping at <http://www.birdingonthe.net/maillinglists/DIGI.html> is a good resource to learn about the latest camera/scope combinations, field techniques, etc.

Leonard Medlock lives in Exeter and enjoys photographing birds. He is the web master for the New Hampshire Bird Records Web site and a board member of the Seacoast Chapter at www.seacoastchapter.org.

Abbreviations Used

BBC	Brookline Bird Club	R.	River
BBS	Breeding Bird Survey	Rd.	Road
CA	Conservation Area	Rt.	Route
CC	Country Club	SF	State Forest
CFT	NH Audubon Chapter Field Trip	St. Pk.	State Park
FT	Field Trip	SPNHF	Society for the Protection of NH Forests, Concord
L.	Lake	T&M	Thompson & Meserves (Purchase)
LPC	Loon Preservation Committee	TNC	The Nature Conservancy
NA	Natural Area	WMA	Wildlife Management Area
NHA	New Hampshire Audubon	WMNF	White Mountain National Forest
NHBR	New Hampshire Bird Records	WS	NHA Wildlife Sanctuary
NHRBC	NH Rare Birds Committee	~	approximately
NWR	National Wildlife Refuge		
PO	Post Office		

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