



Bob Brind-Surch Natures Photos



Natures Photos

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Secret Mammals of Britain



I have spent many years studying and attempting to photograph British mammals so I know first-hand exactly how difficult this can be as most of our native species are extremely secretive and some even nocturnal. Producing good images of British mammals in the wild can be tricky with certain species proving most elusive.

I am therefore thrilled to be able to offer an opportunity to use a private wildlife collection in Devon as the setting for this workshop. The owner has over 16 years' experience working with wildlife film makers and photographers. He has created a series

of purpose built photographic and film sets where we can photograph a splendid collection of captive mammals. The aim of this centre is to provide an unparalleled opportunity to photograph the broadest range of British mammals with relative ease and in highly realistic surroundings.

Species at the centre include:

- Scottish wildcats in two large enclosures one with a natural mound and log piles;
- otters housed in a large enclosure with a pond surrounded with bull rushes, reeds and fallen logs making excellent backdrops;
- wild boar in a stretch of woodland with natural tree cover and bramble patches;
- foxes in two large purpose built enclosure with a hill and natural dens;
- muntjac and sika deer in their own naturally landscaped enclosures;
- pine marten in specially built enclosures we;
- polecat in a series of different enclosures where we can photograph without any sides and thus get superb up close photos;
- weasels, polecats, mink, stoats and water voles all in purpose built sets with specially designed photographic access.

We enter all these enclosures and thus can get super photos uninterrupted by wire mesh.



The larger species such as the red fox, muntjac deer, otters, wild boar and beavers are permanently housed in spacious landscaped enclosures.

The centre also has a series of smaller mammals such as water shrew, harvest mice, bank voles, edible dormice (dependant on the time of year), hedgehogs and others. All these are displayed in specially developed sets where we again have uninterrupted access to the animals.

The centre is part of the breeding project for European beavers and animals and conditions permitting we ought to be able to release a wild beaver into a field where you can obtain excellent up close photos. This represents a very rare opportunity to see beavers, an endearing

animal that are well known but seldom photographed. Shy and semi nocturnal in the wild they represent a challenge for photographers and are rarely captured in pictures.

The otters are in their own spacious landscaped enclosure and will be fed especially for us. They are perfectly accustomed to photographers and you will have a number of opportunities to photograph them. You can even lie in the grass and achieve excellent close up photographs eye to eye with this magnificent animal, photograph them swimming or feeding on one of the fallen logs.

The foxes have their own hill and pond and the muntjac are in a field with clumps of rushes and long grass. The wildcats have a large enclosure with central grassy hill and log piles and shrubs for them to hide in.

We will be able to enter all these larger enclosures to take photographs.

In addition there are a series of outdoor sets which have been especially planted to mimic a range of natural habitats comprise heathland, dry stone walls, rock mound, woodland, hedge bank, wetland pools and culm (sedge) grassland. All have fully mature vegetation, rocks, hollow logs, tree stumps or rock piles and are raised up with specially designed portals to allow unimpeded eyelevel opportunities to photograph the animals. We will use these with the polecats, mink, water voles and pine martin.



The centre also has an “undercover” facility which is well-lit and has a wide range of enclosures, aquaria, assorted props and vegetation to allow us to construct highly realistic small sets. Mammals we can photograph here include weasels, harvest mice, hedgehogs, wood mice, voles, rats and the very rare water shrew. This is one of only two locations in Britain where you can photograph these splendid little aquatic mammals.

Given the opportunities and distance this is a two day event with special arrangements for those wanting to arrive the evening before to save travel problems getting to Devon especially in the summer. We will have sufficient time to spend with the wealth of animals available – this is not a rushed workshop.

As your experienced wildlife photography guide I will lead the workshop and provide all the necessary photographic guidance and training. This workshop is designed specifically

for the enthusiastic photographers with a real interest in photographing wildlife. My aim on this and all my courses and tours is quite simple, to help you master many of the field techniques required of a competent wildlife photographer and to come away having improved your technique, your knowledge of the subjects and with some memorable images.

We will have an extremely knowledgeable and experienced animal handler with us throughout the workshop and they will do their best to ensure that the animals are in prime positions for photography. They will also be more than happy to answer any questions you have about the animals, their requirements, ecology, breeding habits, distribution or any other aspect of their lives.



Schedule and accommodation

Given the sheer wealth of opportunities at this venue and the distance from most centres of population this will be a two day course. I am able to make arrangements for accommodation if required. I use a local facility at Frankaborough Farm - www.devonfarmcottage.co.uk – and almost all guests do the same. They have a series of normally self-catering holiday cottages but I have arranged for them to provide us with a reduced price a bed and breakfast option. This is an excellent arrangement as it does also allow you to be self-sufficient for all meals if required but this will have to be arranged with the farm when booking. There are however other options within a 2 mile radius of the centre and I will advise on booking. If this suits you I can make the arrangements for you. Many guests on this workshop bring partners, even if they are not part of the workshop, and some even extend their stay to explore Devon more widely.

The price for the workshop excludes accommodation and meals although tea and coffee will be available throughout the day.

Both days start at 10:00 prompt and many guests elect to arrive the night before and stay an extra night at the B&B. We will break for a picnic lunch, available on request (at extra cost or feel free to bring your own). The afternoon session will continue until 4:00pm.

Evening meals can be taken in a local pub or if staying at the farmhouse cottages these are self-catering so please feel free to prepare your own. Please note that the nearest basic food shop is about 10 miles away.

Fitness level and clothing required

The enclosures are very large and there will be some limited walking involved between them. The ground may be rough underfoot and possibly wet, you will therefore need suitable sturdy or waterproof footwear. In addition you will probably want to lie on the ground in the enclosures to get some of the best shots so you may get wet and muddy. We will be outside most of the day and it could therefore be chilly so please wear suitable warm waterproof clothing preferably with plenty of layers so you can remain comfortable if conditions should change. Alternatively we may experience an extremely hot day so do also come prepared with a hat and sun lotion.

You will need to be able to pack up and transport your camera equipment from location to location. A good camera bag will therefore be useful.

I am afraid that due to its use of varied natural locations and especially the larger enclosures this workshop is not suitable for wheelchair users or guests with specific mobility requirements. If you have any particular concerns please contact me directly.

Photography Level

The whole day is given over to photography and is open to photographers of all abilities and standards of equipment. You will however gain far more from the workshop if you bring a digital SLR camera and are fairly conversant with its controls and the basic principles of general photography, for example the options to setting and managing shutter speed, aperture etc. If you are new to photography I also offer a separate workshop which it might be worth doing first. Its called getting off auto and details are on my website. As your wildlife photographer guide I will however be on hand all day to assist by explaining relevant techniques, camera settings etc. to help you to take the best photographs.

Photographic equipment required

Almost any medium length lenses will do for this workshop but for some shots in the enclosures and more distant deer shots a lens reaching 300mm or more would be better. Shorter lenses are better for capturing individual animals especially the small mammals. In reality a combination of lenses from 50mm to 300mm or longer, perhaps as zooms, will therefore be ideal. A macro lens would be very useful indeed for some of the smaller species.

A tripod isn't always necessary and may get in the way but if you are taking a longer lens you might like to include one or perhaps consider a monopod. Please be aware as we will be walking between enclosures you will need to carry it with you.

Whilst there will be a very limited number of occasions when flash light will be necessary if you have a speedlight or other flash gun please bring it but please remember to check with me or one of the handlers before using it.

This will be an intensive workshop so bring plenty of memory cards and expect to take home lots of great images. Whilst we will be operating around the centre for much of the day there will be limited opportunities for charging cameras or laptops. Please therefore bring plenty of batteries. There are toilet facilities at the centre and hot drinks will be provided throughout the day.

If you have any particular questions re equipment please contact me before the workshop. I can also arrange for very cost effective hire of individual lenses or even camera for the day if required. It may be that you, for example, want to use this as an opportunity to experiment with a specific lens in a 'real world situation' before considering buying one.

Bob Brind-Surch



All dates, availability and costs are advertised on my website, www.naturesphotos.co.uk.

Other dates may be available if groups wanted to book them. Please contact me for further information.

To book places please visit my website and complete an online booking form or contact me direct, details below.

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