



**Bob  
Brind-Surch**  
Natures  
Photos

## A guest's perspective on a British Wildlife photo workshop – Surrey.

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Guest: Stephen Francis

I am a keen amateur naturalist and photographer with a particular passion for British wildlife. From days as a lad in the 60's I have enjoyed nothing more than sitting quietly on a bank or in a wood watching our wonderful wildlife. When I started work my company ran a photographic club for employees. I joined and through this and with fellow enthusiasts developed my other passion photography and particularly for me wildlife photography. The two interests go hand in hand but are not easy. Our wildlife is secretive and whilst an enjoyable challenge never particular easy to photograph. Having heard Bob talk on wildlife photography at our camera club and seeing this workshop advertised I jumped at the opportunity of getting close to British wildlife and learning from a skilled photographer at the same time.



### Expectations:

I wasn't sure what to expect from the animals or the tuition. I had read the blurb Bob sent out but wasn't prepared for freedom we would have on the day and wonderfully landscaped enclosures. Whilst I would never pass off a captive animal as "wild shot" it was perfectly possible to produce a photograph that showed the animal in a perfectly wild setting.

At school I always struggled to learn in a formal classroom situation far preferring the "apprenticeship" model I had as an engineer at work. I was therefore so pleased to see this was exactly the model Bob adopted. As I read from the feedback of a fellow participant on one of his workshops "If he had been my teacher at school I would have learnt so much more". He was always on hand to help in a purely practical way, showing me first-hand what I needed to do to get the best shot and full of really useful suggestions re framing and composing photographs. You could see he was a naturalist first and foremost. He understood the animals and then as an experienced photographer knew just how to capture some great shots.



I have attended many workshops advertised by big companies in the popular photo magazines and many have disappointed me. This however was one where my experience far exceeded my expectations – I will certainly be back on another in the near future and recommend it to absolutely anyone.

## Highlights:

Getting really close to a fox or a wildcat was just magical. As an amateur naturalist simply being able to observe and enjoy these animals at such close quarters was a real privilege. Being able to photograph them and take the experience home with me was a pure delight. Bob and the keepers were so knowledgeable on each animal I learnt a great deal not bad for me as a lifelong member of the British Mammal Society!



The otters were a dream. I have spent many hours watching for otters and walking streams where fishermen tell me they see them but to no avail. Being able to spend ½ hour in an enclosure with a pair of these delightful animals was heaven. The polecats, mink and particularly the stoats, weasels (the other mustelids as Bob kept correctly calling them) were also a great. Whilst the weasels were a real challenge as they moved extremely fast there is simply nowhere else that I could attempt or succeed in getting photos of these magnificent small carnivores and all in a near natural setting. I would go again just to photograph them.

Another highlight were the red squirrels. They were in a large woodland enclosure and quite, quite tame. With the keepers help we were able to get them to “perch” on silver birch and other naturally planted trees to make a perfect if somewhat contrived shot.

## Feedback:

The course was excellent, the staff really helpful and the enclosures so well designed and built my photos look really natural. Your tuition was just at the right level; you didn't interfere but seemed always to be there with that helpful tip that made all the difference to the success of my photos. I can genuinely say my photography improved during the day. The opportunity to photograph the mice in the indoor 'studio' was the real icing on the cake for me. Thank you for organising the day I hope to return soon to try and make the most of what I have learned.



## Final comments:

On the feedback form after the workshop Bob asked if we would recommend this workshop to a friend. The answer is simple - YES ! – and I would go with them to experience it again. Bob also runs a 2 day workshop at a similar centre in Devon which I have immediately booked on. The chance to observe our native wildlife close up and spend time learning photography at the same time is something I simply must experience again. By way of a warning however, workshops of this quality are addictive. Once you have been on one you will want to go again.