



Top 10 Tips to Take Great Zoo Photos

Zoos are one of the best places to photograph wildlife. They have the largest concentration of wildlife per acre anywhere. The animals are not spooked by humans; they have limited range and usually are set in scenic surroundings. On the downside there are a lot of humans present and the range of shots is limited.

Before we provide our top 10 tips, the two most important items of zoo photography need to be addressed before you visit. First, you must have a camera (digital with zoom is best) and a photo editor program. Practice with both before visiting the zoo. Try photographing objects at various distances under different light conditions. The big advantage of a digital camera and computer photo editor programs is that you can practice with both endlessly at no cost.

Other items you should check prior to visiting the zoo are the zoo's feeding schedules, shows and keeper interactions.

Here are Zoo and Aquarium Visitor's top ten tips to make you a great zoo photographer.

1. Time of day. Early mornings and late afternoons are always best. Mid-day shots tend to be harsh and wash out the colors. Depending on the exact direction of the sun, it can shadow portions of the face, especially the eyes on many species. Early mornings and late afternoons are also the times of day when wildlife is most active resulting in opportunities to film the species in active modes.
2. Foggy and rainy days. When the sky is clouded and moisture is in the air, many times shadows are eliminated. It also diffuses light, making for some special and unique photos.
3. The animal. With wildlife photography, when capturing images of single animals the face is the focal point. On the face, the eyes become the most important feature. They capture the expression of each individual. Make sure they are not shadowed.
4. The context. What do you want to shoot and how will it be framed. Do you want a shot of the face, the whole body, or the exhibit itself? Whatever you are photographing should represent at least 80% of the picture. If you are attempting to do a head or face shot, zoom in until it fills most of the viewfinder. If you are doing a whole body shot, make sure the feet or tail is not cut off.
5. Angles. Once you have taken the shot you want, move to the other end of the exhibit and see what can be captured in your viewfinder. If you are photographing through a glass or acrylic display, NEVER attempt to clean the display. Also, never allow any part of your camera to touch the display. Scratches are very expensive to remove.
6. Camera settings. If the animal is stationary, a long exposure can be used provided you can keep the camera still. If the animal is moving, you will want to use the fastest setting possible. Before bringing a tripod or bipod, please check with the facility first. Many facilities DO NOT allow their use.

7. ALWAYS carry extra batteries.
8. Take the camera's instruction book with you. Use it until you have all of the proper settings for each situation memorized.
9. Patience is an essential quality with both the animals you are photographing and the other visitors who will get in your way. Call in advance and ask when the school visits are scheduled. You may want to avoid trying to shoot during those times.
10. Look for flash restrictions. Some animals get spooked or agitated by camera flashes and as a result you will occasionally see "No Flash" displays.

Manners and etiquette while photographing at the zoo.

1. Animal photographers do not have priority or special preference over other guests. Don't expect special treatment or become annoyed when visitors walk between you and your shot.
2. Do not do things to get the animal to look directly at you. This includes yelling, throwing objects, or teasing with food.
3. Respect the barriers. Do not climb any fences for a closer shot.
4. Do not shoot close ups of other zoo visitors without their permission.

After your photo session.

1. Download and view your photos as soon as possible. This will give you the best chance to remember what the circumstances were at the time each photo was taken, helping you to improve your future photos.
2. Delete at least 80% of your pictures. Honestly evaluate your photos for content, light, and overall quality.
3. Only show your best 5 photos for the day.
4. Use your photos to recruit at least one new person to accompany you and photograph the zoo animals during your next visit. Recruit an independent photo judge.
5. Take pride in your work.

If you are a commercial photographer and intend to resell or use any photos, please check with the marketing or public relations department prior to visiting the facility.

Courtesy of Zoo and Aquarium Visitor <http://www.zandavisitor.com>

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