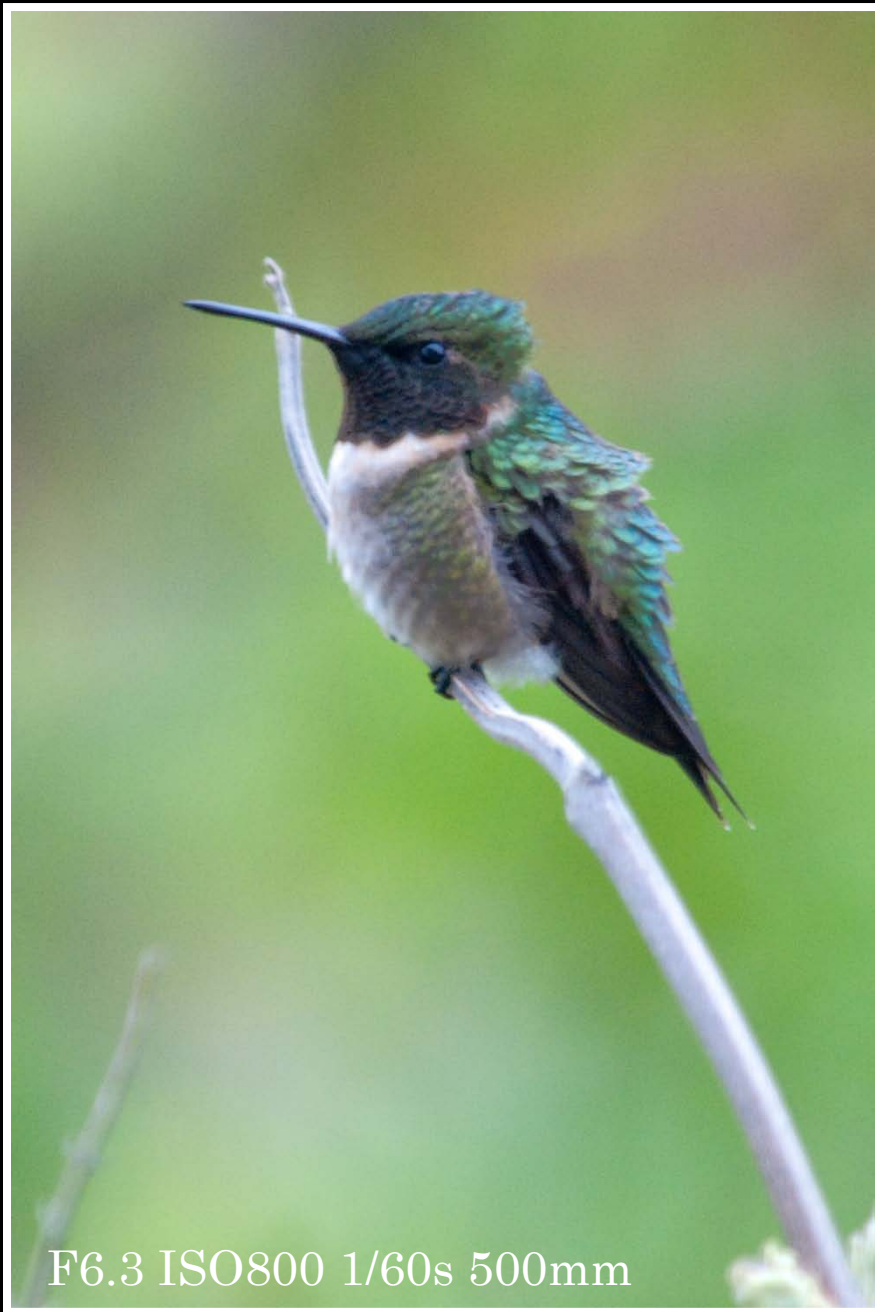




HUMMINGBIRD PHOTOGRAPHY

TRIAL & ERROR USING OFF CAMERA STROBES

October 2012
Mike Thomas



The Quest Begins

Every since I saw my first hummingbird show up in my back yard, I have been dying to take a good photo of one.

My first photo is not great and is a male sitting on a branch.

But I wanted one in flight.



First Try

Out of focus

Motion Blur

Grainy

Dull



Better



With Flower



Another Shot with Flower



Overkill

So I looked around on Flickr and got a few tips.

I set up six flashes around a feeder and blasted the poor hummingbird on full power.

My Nikon D300 was set to a shutter speed of 1/8000 using Focal Plane high-speed sync (FP Sync).



Second Try

This resulted in photos that still had motion blur in the wings.
Turns out I made a few mistakes.

Issues

- Ambient Light

Too Much Ambient Light

According to Michael Roy

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/michelroy/sets/72157605901129867/>

"the ghosting appear because too much light hit the sensor. if you disconnect the flashes, everything should be almost black... if not ghosting appear. 1 / 16 should be ok for the flashes..., I would increase the f stop to f14 to f20 lower the iso to 250... the flashes have to be close to subject... use a patio umbrella or shoot when it is not in full sun... just like in studio."



Third Try

–FP Sync

–Shallow Depth of Field

–Note the black background./No ambient Light

Issues with Focal Plane Sync

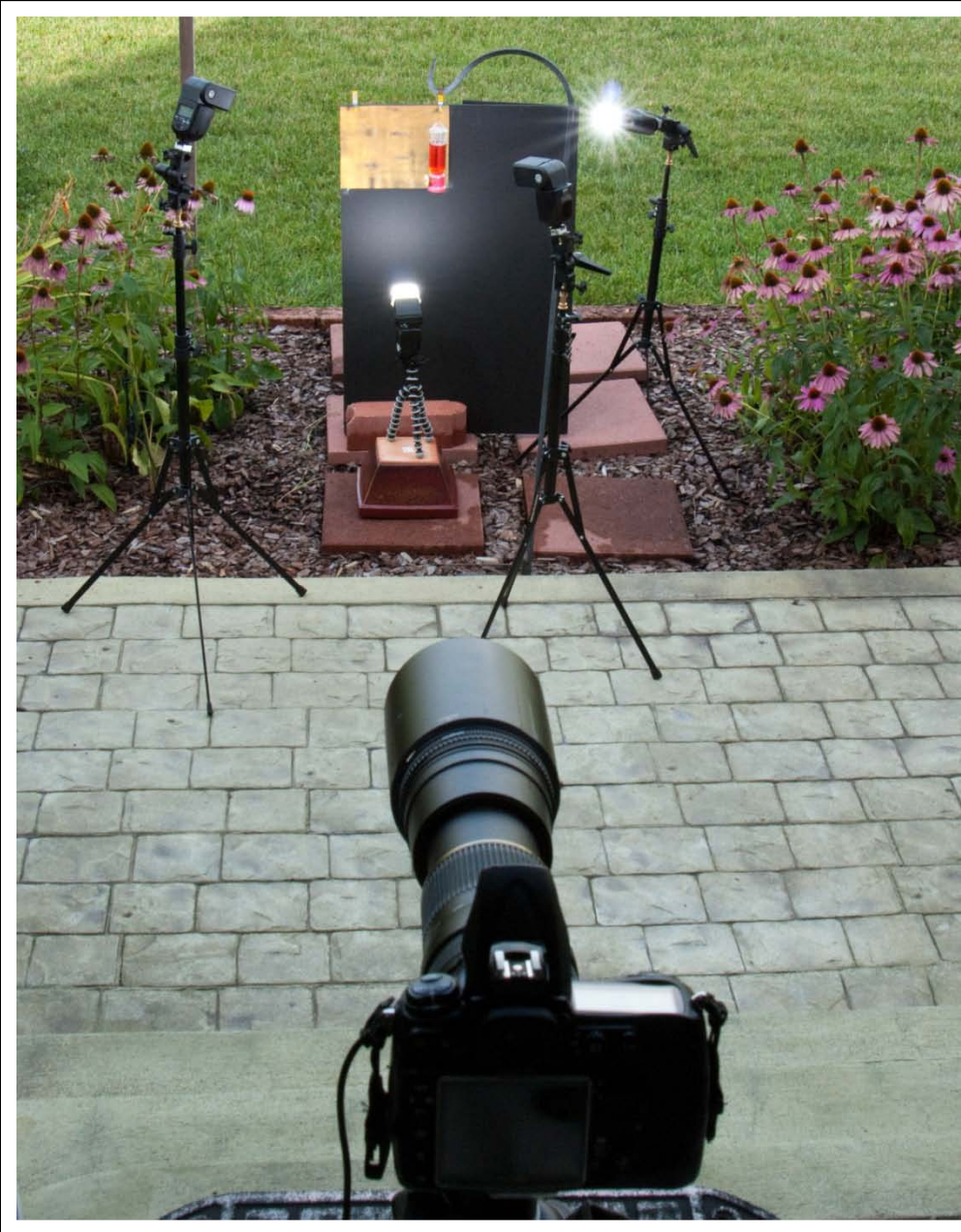
According to John Groseclose

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/iaincaradoc/>

"If you're trying to "freeze" motion, FP Sync isn't the way to go. Since it turns the flash into a constant light source for the 1/300 or so it takes for the complete transit of the shutter slit across the sensor, you will still end up with blur. If you'd used an ND filter to knock down the ambient to black instead of using the high shutter speed to do it, you'd be using the flash duration of 1/1000ish at full power instead of the 1/300ish of the FP Sync. And since FP Sync loses a lot of power anyway, you might even be able to drop the flash power to 1/16 or so, and get a flash duration of 1/10000 or shorter (see page 122 of your SB-800 manual for the power/duration listings)."

Background Trick

- Prop up poster board a couple feet behind the feeder and tape a background photo to the board.
- My best results were with shots of the flowers in my garden.
- I shoot the background photos slightly out of focus to simulate a nice bokeh.
- Print on a piece of plain paper and tape to the foam board behind the feeder.
- Add 4th strobe to light the background.



Setup

- I create a miniature hummingbird studio with lights and background just like you would use to shoot a portrait.
- I use a hummingbird feeder that has no perch on it forcing the hummingbird to fly while eating.
- I hang the feeder on a shepherds crook pole with wire to keep it from moving.



Camera

- Nikon D300
- Tamron 200-500mm lens
- Nikkor 200-400 VR II
- I set my camera to manual mode
 - Aperture set to F16 -F22
 - Shutter speed set to 1/250 sec.



Lighting

- Three Metz 48 flashes around the feeder pointing to the space in front of the feeder.
- Nikon SB800 flash on a small tripod on the ground in front of the poster board pointing at the background photo.
- I use Nikon CLS to remotely trigger the four flashes.
- The flashes are set at around 1/16 power for a very quick burst of light.

Nikon Creative Lighting System

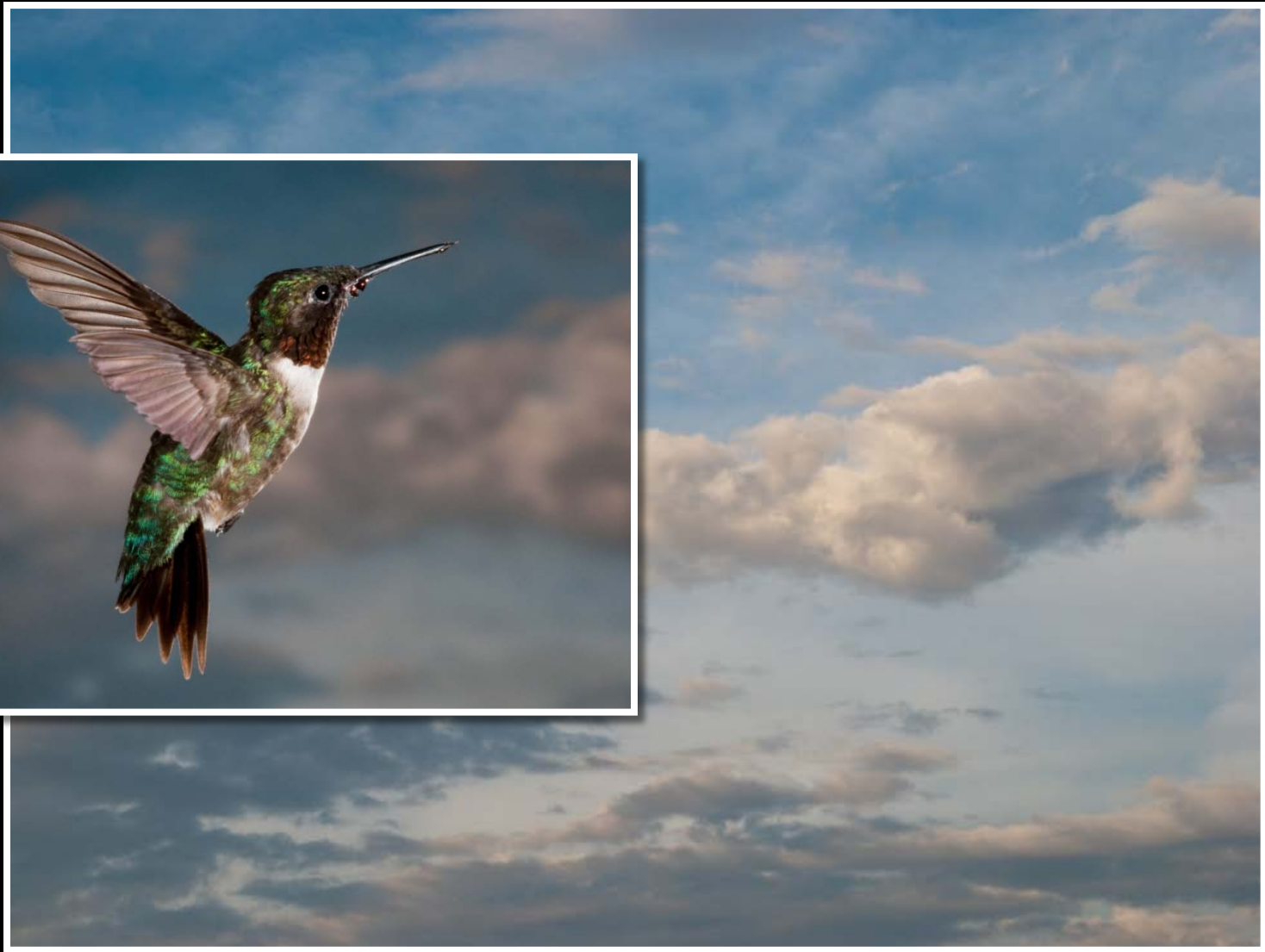
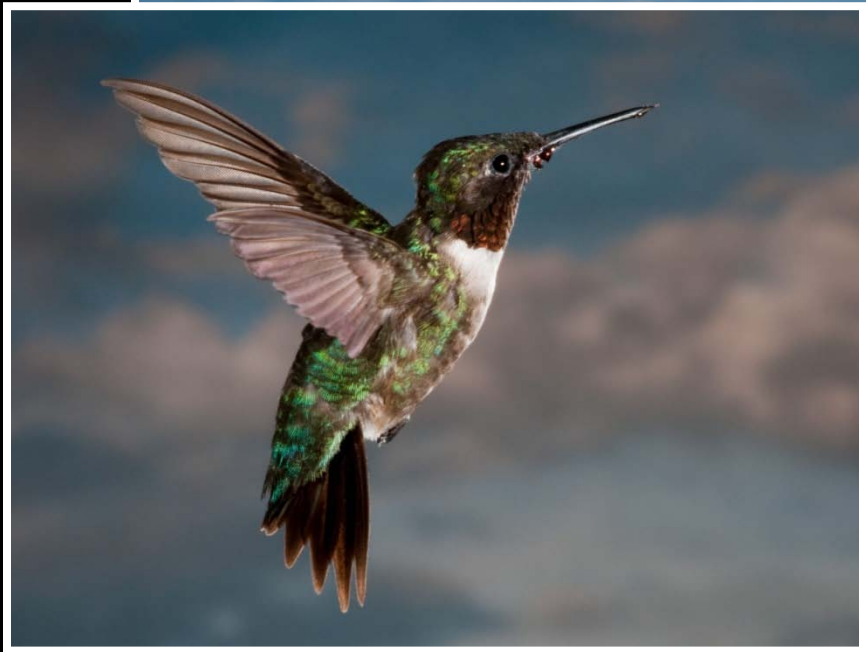
- Advanced wireless lighting
- Controlling multiple wireless flash units
- The Master sends out a very small light pulses to provide the Remotes and they communicate back subject exposure readings before the main exposure.
- Effective wireless range is 10m (33') Three Remote groups.
- No limit to the number of lights contained in each group
- Can adjust the flash output level of every flash unit from the camera
- Four channels













Lessons Learned

- Reduce my shutter speed to under 1/250 (i.e., no FP sync).
- Increase the depth of field.
 - Some of the blur was from my shallow depth of field from my wide open F-stop.
 - I closed down that F-stop to around F16 to F20 to the point that without flash, the photos were black.
- Decrease the power of the strobes down to say 1/16 power.
 - Lower power settings actually allow the strobes to fire faster.
 - When the strobes are the primary light source their speed is actually the important factor in the exposure.
 - In stead of six flashes I am now using three on stands set around the feeder.



Metz 48 AF-1 Digit

Nikon SB-900

Nikon SB-800



Maha MH-C801D

Eight-Cell 1-Hour AAA
charger/conditioner

Sony Eneloop

Retain 70 to 85% of
their capacity on the
shelf

Energizer

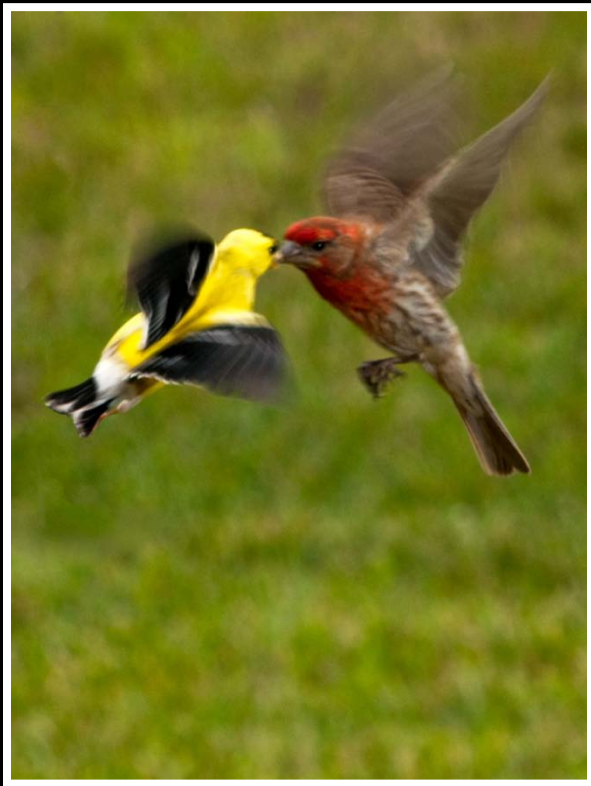
Ideal for the most
advanced, high-drain
devices--digital cameras

Tips

- Best done on overcast days.
 - I wait for the sun to pass over my house leaving my backyard in shadow.
- Use a tripod.
- Use manual focus.
 - I focus on the spigot on the feeder with the feeder to the far right of the frame.
- Use a cable release to trigger the camera.
- The best time to shoot hummingbirds in this area is in August.

OFF CAMERA STROBES NOT JUST FOR HUMMINGBIRDS

I use flashes to photograph other birds in my backyard.



Control the
aperture



Control the
ambient light



Control the
motion blur



Or stop the
motion

QUESTIONS?

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