



Jari Peltomäki

In the world of bird photography, the images of **Jari Peltomäki** always attract awards and admiration from his peers. He works almost exclusively from hides near his home in Finland and is a mentor to many who seek out his advice and inspiration

Interview by Keith Wilson

Great grey owls are the largest species of owl. They are also Jari's favourite. With spectacular images like this it's not hard to see why

Canon EOS-1D Mk III, EF 70-200mm f/2.8L IS USM lens at 173mm, ISO 800, 1/1250sec at f/4.5

Interview



As one of Europe's most widely published bird photographers, Jari Peltomäki is a highly respected authority on birdlife and a sought after

judge of international photo competitions. He has won numerous awards for his photography in Finland, France, Germany and the UK. Through his company Finnature, Jari provides workshops photographing brown bears, owls, ospreys, wolverine and other Finnish wildlife, as well as photo tours to Hokkaido, Hungary and Spitsbergen.

<http://www.jaripeltomaki.com>

<http://www.finnature.com>

Which interest came first, nature or photography?

I started as a birdwatcher when I was 12 years old in 1977 and I got my first camera in 1978. I started my photography with black and white film, and my first camera was a Russian Zenit TTL.

When you were growing up in Finland, which animals interested you the most?

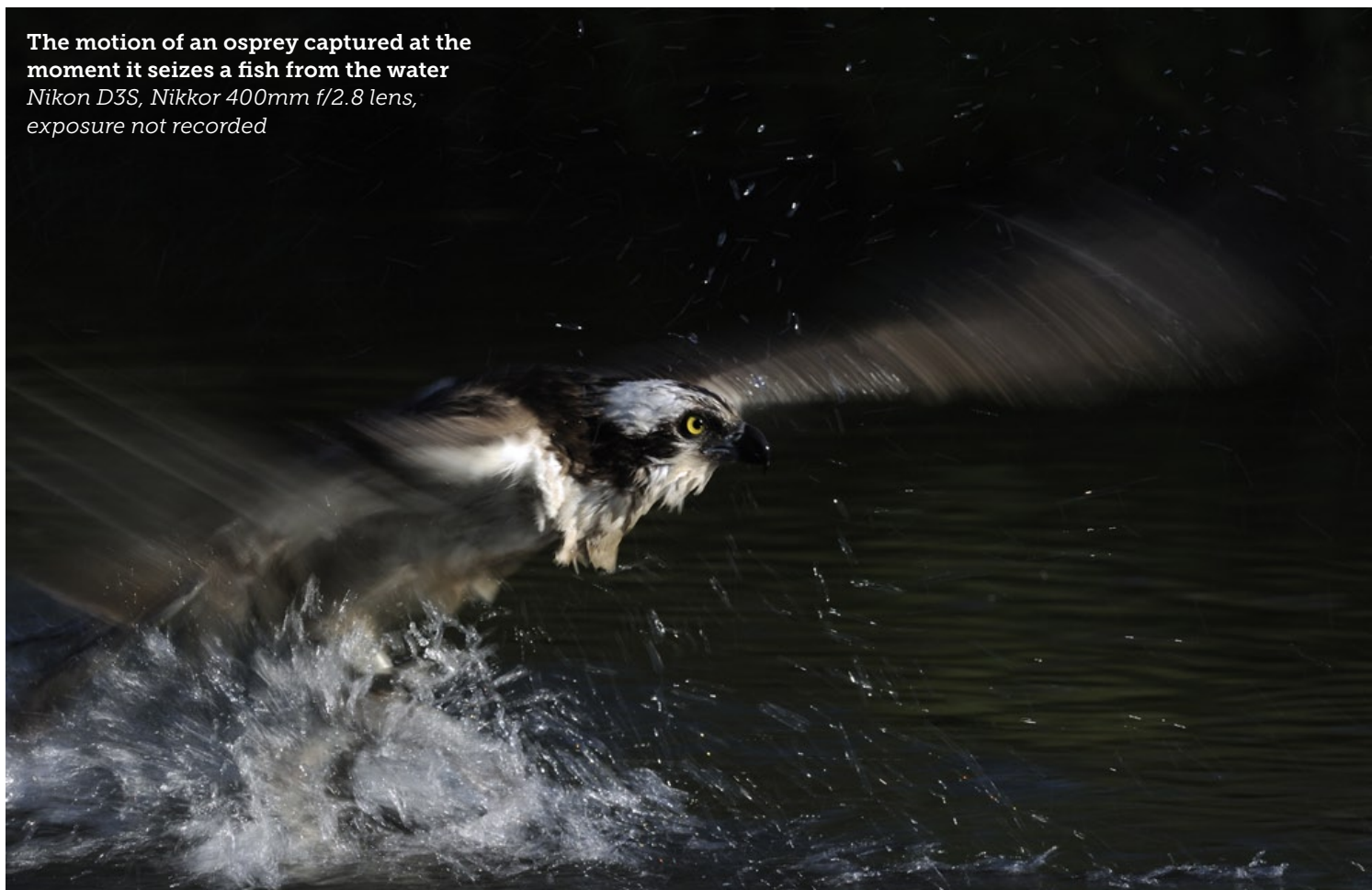
I have been always been most interested in birds – and Finland is great place for birds!



Golden eagle and raven in snowstorm
Nikon D3S, Nikkor 400mm f/2.8 lens,
ISO 1600, exposure not recorded

The motion of an osprey captured at the moment it seizes a fish from the water

Nikon D3S, Nikkor 400mm f/2.8 lens,
exposure not recorded



“We have the best golden eagle feeding station in Finland, and on a good day there can be up to ten eagles visiting the baits”

When did you decide that you wanted to make a life as a wildlife photographer?

I have been self-employed since 1992 and I consider that 1998 was the start of my professional wildlife photography career. I believe that meeting with British photographers like David Tipling and Mike Mockler encouraged me to take my photography more seriously.

You have travelled the world photographing birds, where is your favourite location to photograph birds?

After Finland, I like most the Varanger area in northern Norway, but also Hokkaido in Japan. Both places are different enough from Finland and birdlife is abundant. Varanger is especially good in March and Hokkaido in February, when there is winter and lot of snow.

What makes owls so special?

There is something mysterious about owls: their silent flight, almost human-like face and secretive life in the forest.

Why did you and David Tipling decide to do a photo book about owls?

We have been photographing owls together in Finland and we both enjoy working with owls. I was delighted when David asked me if I would like to make an owl book with him.

Do you have a favourite species of owl?

Great grey owls are definitely my favourite owl species and I have spent altogether many months with this species. Every now and then I have been able to have a deeper connection with some great grey owl individuals – and they have been the best experiences in my photography life.

Two black grouse lekking near
Jari's home in Liminka, Finland
Canon EOS-1D MkII N, EF 300mm
f/2.8 lens, ISO 500, 1/1000sec at f/5



A sharply focused study of a hawk
owl gliding over frozen grassland
near Jari's home in Liminka, Finland
Canon EOS-1D Mk II N, EF 300mm
f/2.8 lens, ISO 800, 1/2000sec at f/3.2

*“There is something mysterious about owls:
their silent flight, almost human-like face
and secretive life in the forest”*



Two brown bears check their surroundings on an early autumn day
*Nikon D3, Nikkor 300mm f/2.8 lens,
ISO 1600, 1/60sec at f/6.3*





A pretty red poll braves a snowfall. A slow shutter speed renders the falling snow as background streaks
 Canon EOS-1D Mk III, EF 500mm f/4L IS USM lens, ISO 400, 1/60sec at f/11

Which other bird species are among your favourites?

Hawk. And snowy owls are also a very special bird species for me. I have been working quite a lot also with golden eagles.

Do you have a favourite lens for wildlife photography?

As a Nikon ambassador I could use all the Nikon lenses, but my favourite lens is the Nikkor 200-400mm f/4, because it is fairly lightweight and also possible to handhold. It is also a very versatile lens length-wise. With zoom lenses, it is often easier to compose the image in the field than with fixed lenses. It is also fast and sharp enough and works well with a 1.4x converter.

Which is the harder subject to photograph, wolves, wolverines or bears?

In Finland, wolves are the hardest to photograph, since they are the most persecuted large carnivores and therefore very shy. There are two commercial feeding

sites and set-up hides where wolves visit fairly regularly. Bears are easy to photograph nowadays in Finland from the different hides and there are a couple of feeding sites and hides where wolverines visit regularly. Without feeding and hides, large carnivores are not possible to photograph in Finland.

Since starting Finnature, what are the most popular workshops among visiting photographers?

When we have a good situation to photograph owls in winter – we will send out a newflash with some set departures to photograph hunting great grey owls and these workshops and tours always fill up quickly. Some winters there are possibilities to photograph hawk and snowy owls at the same time. We have the best golden eagle feeding station in Finland, and on a good day there can be up to ten eagles visiting the baits. The best time to photograph eagles is January to February. Lekking black grouse, capercaillie and ruffs are favourite subjects in springtime. Finnature

photographic trips to Varanger, northern Norway, also have been very popular during the past 20 years, both in spring and in summer.

What is the most enjoyable part of leading a photo workshop?

I enjoy being outdoors and it is great to have people around you sharing the same passion – wildlife photography. There are always so many things to discuss: the camera settings, composition, behavior of species, places where people have been and who they know.

Where do you derive your photographic inspiration?

I love all the beauty in nature: light, movement, patterns and details. I think that the birds are really beautiful and I want to share the beauty of the birds with a wider audience. I hope that by showing the beauty in nature

people will appreciate the natural world more and they will try to protect it more.

What camera, lenses and other accessories make up your essential wildlife photography kit?

My typical photography trip gear is: Nikon D4, Nikon D800, Nikkor 200-400mm f/4, Nikkor 70-200mm f/2.8, Nikkor 24-70mm f/2.8, 1.4x converter, 2x converter, Nikon V2 with 10-30mm lens and adapter, Gitzo tripod, Manfrotto 701 videohead, Black Rapid straps for cameras, memory cards, spare batteries.

Do you shoot video as well?

I love shooting videos!

What is the best thing about video compared to stills?

“I like videos because they bring out the atmosphere and feeling of the place better than just the still images”



Spring comes to Liminka - a sand martin feeds its young
 Nikon D3S, Nikkor 500mm f/4 lens plus 1.4x converter, ISO 800, exposure not recorded



Amid an April snow flurry in northern Finland, a pair of greylag geese take flight
Canon EOS-1D Mk III, EF 500mm f/4L IS USM lens, ISO 800, 1/1600sec at f/9

“I really want to share the beauty of the natural world with the public through my images and hopefully convince them that it is worth protecting nature”

I like videos because they bring out the atmosphere and feeling of the place better than just the still images. This is because of the sound recording and the movement. Videos make a great addition to the slideshows.

Finnish and Scandinavian nature photography has many admirers. In your opinion what is it about your style and approach to photography that makes it different?

Almost all Finnish wildlife photographers today are following in Hannu Hautala’s footsteps. His way to photograph nature and wildlife has been a great inspiration for all of us. In Hannu’s images, the bird or animal is often quite small in the frame and the surrounding environment makes a beautiful framing or backdrop to the image. Beautiful nature, four clear seasons of the year and long periods of golden light are probably some of the elements that make Scandinavian photography outstanding. Maybe also the fact that it is

not so long ago that we were still hunting our food from the forest (and some of us still do), and maybe the fact that we are not completely separated from nature, but we are still part of it.

You are also a passionate conservationist. How does your photography make a difference to preserving wildlife?

I really want to share the beauty of the natural world with the public through my images and hopefully convince them that it is worth protecting nature. I am a founding member of the Friends of Liminka Bay Association and we have made an identification quiz of my bird photos to schoolchildren of all ages. Thousands of schoolchildren will take part in this competition and it is great to see and feel the excitement of children who reach the final of the competition at Liminka Bay Nature Centre. It is great when young people will get interested in putting the name in to the bird.



A brown bear emerges from the woods near Martinselkonen, Finland
Canon EOS-1D MkII N, EF 300mm f/2.8 lens, ISO 800, 1/160sec at f/4

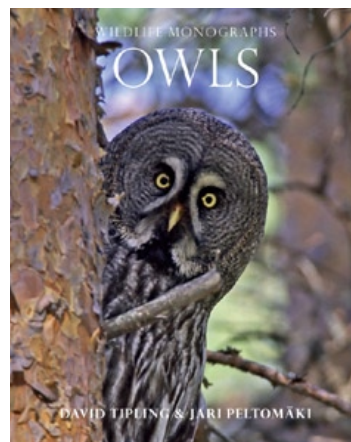


A brilliant sunset on a clear day provides a superb backdrop to this flock of Eurasian cranes
Nikon D7000, Nikkor 200mm f/4 lens, ISO 1600, exposure not recorded

“Beautiful nature, four clear seasons of the year and long periods of golden light are probably some of the elements that make Scandinavian photography outstanding”

What’s your most memorable moment as a wildlife photographer?

This must be when I found the very attractive leucistic (albino) great grey owl, and we gave her the name Linda, after a sexy blond Finnish violinist. I was actually looking for a snowy owl, which I had photographed in the same area on the previous day, but couldn’t find it on regular perches in the open field area. Then I noticed a whitish owl far away at the edge of the forest and I was wondering what a snowy owl was doing in the forest. I went closer and noticed that the bird was actually an almost white great grey owl! These kind of leucistic great greys are very rare in the world. I managed to get some quite nice photos on slide film of the owl on that same evening and I was lucky enough that an almost full moon was rising early on that same evening – so I got the owl with the moon. You can read the full story of this ‘blond owl’ in the Owl book!



● **Owls, featuring the magnificent photography of Jari Peltomäki and David Tipling, is published by Evans Mitchell Books, 130 City Road, London EC1V 2NW, Tel: 020 3617 8726, <http://www.embooks.co.uk> ISBN: 978-1-901268-62-1; SRP: £9.99/ \$16.95**