

 **SWIMMING POOLS**
Nikon D3, Nikon AF-S
70-200mm f/2.8G ED VR, 1/1000
sec, f/5.6, ISO200



JASON HAWKES

CLOSE-UP

Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No, it's aerial photographer Jason Hawkes! He tells Keith Wilson why he doesn't take pictures when he's grounded, and why he really loves photographing cities at night...

Jason Hawkes is rarely happier than when his life is up in the air. He has a view of the world that most of us only glimpse through the window of a plane at take-off. Gazing down on city skyscrapers, sea-lashed shores and idyllic villages, Jason is one of the world's most sought-after aerial photographers. He is certainly the most prolific, with images published in more than 40 books and countless magazines. But, like any other photographer, he finds his real work begins when he is grounded, in front of the computer screen...

On average, how many gigabytes of pictures do you shoot a week?

On a busy week I might shoot 30GB. It varies according to the weather. I can only be sure that I will be flying 24 hours before the flight. When you have a bad spell of weather like we did in the UK this summer, you can be grounded for days. I have to make the most of the good days.

What percentage of shots do you delete?

Zero! When I was shooting film I used to cut some frames when making an edit, but I have since learnt to keep everything. People want the most obscure things and you never know when an image might be





M23/M25 JUNCTION Nikon D3s, Nikon AF 14mm f/2.8, 1/60 sec, f/2.8, ISO3200

“I love shooting cities at night as there’s just so much to shoot... The lights against the night sky are really dramatic”

Jason Hawkes *Aerial Photographer*

needed. The down side is, when I’m not in the air I’m in front of the screen for hours. That’s what I spend most of my days doing.

How important is it to stay on top of image workflow and how do you do it?

I use Adobe Lightroom, and usually have someone in my office captioning and key

wording everything as I shoot it. However, we never seem to catch up and always have a backlog. I back up everything onto a Raid system, an off-site drive, and gold archival DVDs, which are kept in a media safe.

What sort of pictures do you take when you’re grounded?

None! It seems ridiculous, I know, because I love photography, but apart from taking pictures of the kids, I don’t get the camera out when I’m not airborne. I spend most of my time in front of the computer.

How old were you when you were first hooked by photography?

I first got into photography aged 17, when I did a multimedia course at a sixth form

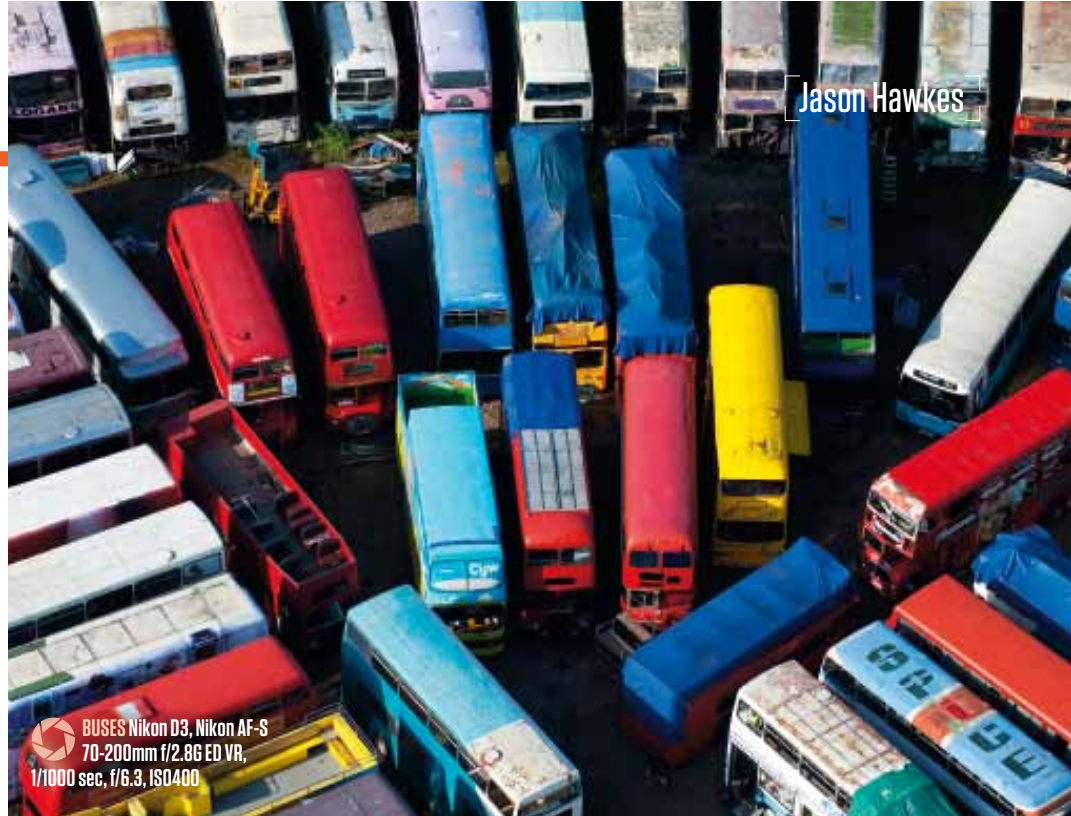
college. I then spent two years doing an HND. After that, I started doing a part-time degree course in photography in London, but I was also working by then and had to stop doing it because of time constraints.

What type of photographer did you think you would be?

Initially, I wanted to do studio photography as I was working as an assistant in studios around Covent Garden. I loved shooting on 5x4in film cameras, spending a whole day setting up for just a single image.

What was your biggest break as a budding aerial photographer?

I shot for a few months from a microlite and then took a portfolio of work to the



Jason Hawkes

BUSES Nikon D3, Nikon AF-S 70-200mm f/2.8G ED VR, 1/1000 sec, f/6.3, ISO400



BROCKWELL LIDO Nikon D3, Nikon AF-S 70-200mm f/2.8G ED VR, 1/1000 sec, f/9, ISO200

editor of *Photography* magazine. It was a great magazine and I'd been reading every issue for a few years. They published eight pages of my pictures and that led to work from other publishers, including my first book deal.

What was your first book?
My first book was *London from the Air*. I was 23 at the time and it's gone on to sell 160,000 copies. Because of the success of that book I was able to decide to become a full-time aerial photographer.

Do you have a favourite location or subject to photograph from the air?
Not really, although I love shooting cities at night as there's just so much to shoot.

www.nphotomag.com

Everything looks so different, and the lights against the night sky are really dramatic.

Is it true that you're afraid of heights?
One of my first jobs was in New York. As we were not allowed to fly low enough, I had to shoot from the top of some skyscrapers, including the Empire State Building. I hated looking over the edge. I'm far more comfortable leaning out of a helicopter.

Leaning out of a helicopter sounds risky. Have there been any close calls?
I have had a couple of near misses, and I once landed and went to undo my ▶

PROFILE



Your at-a-glance guide to Jason's high-flying photographic career

■ Jason Hawkes' clients include global advertising agencies and brands such as Nike, Coca Cola, McCann Erickson, Nokia, HSBC, Saatchi and Saatchi, Ford, American Airlines, Rolex, Toyota, Smirnoff, Mitsubishi and BP.

■ Jason has published more than 40 books featuring his aerial photography, including *Britain from Above* and *New York at Night*.



ELLESMERE PORT Nikon D3,
Nikon AF-S 70-200mm f/2.8G
ED VR, 1/1000 sec, f/5.6, ISO200



THAMESPORT SHIPPING CONTAINERS Nikon D3, Nikon AF-S
70-200mm f/2.8G ED VR, 1/1000 sec, f/2.8, ISO200



NO.1 COURT, WIMBLEDON Nikon D3s, Nikon AF-S 70-200mm
f/2.8G ED VR, 1/1000 sec, f/5, ISO320

harness, only to find that I'd forgotten to do it up in the first place. I don't think that will happen again!

What's your 'desert island lens', the one you could never do without?

The Nikkor AF-S 14-24mm f/2.8G ED wide angle zoom. It's the one I use for most of my work, that and the Nikkor AF-S 70-200mm f/2.8G ED telephoto zoom. I have a bag full of other lenses but these two cover pretty much everything I do.

Do you use Vibration Reduction lenses and do they really make a difference?

Both the lenses I mentioned have VR, and I switch it on, but I'm not sure that it really makes that much of a difference because



I'm shooting at 1/1000 sec at least and that's always fast enough to deal with any vibration from the helicopter.

f/2.8 or f/8?

Because I always have to shoot on 1/1000 sec or faster, and everything is focused at infinity, the working aperture makes less difference to the amount of depth of field than on the ground.

Can you list in order the Nikon cameras you have owned and reveal what was the difference each one gave you?

The first Nikon I owned was an F3, which was quite a nice body to use. I stuck with film for quite a while and used loads of different film cameras, including medium



format. When I moved to digital I used Hasselblads and Phase One backs, but it wasn't until the D3 came out that I gave up everything else, and I have been with Nikon ever since.

How many bodies do you currently own?

I have a Nikon D3, a D3s, and I've also got the new D800.

And how many memory cards?

I have six memory cards in total. The largest I use is 32 GB.

What's the most unusual thing in your camera bag?

I guess it would have to be my harness. I never leave home without one!

What are the techniques that you have to adopt when shooting from a helicopter?

The most important consideration, obviously, is safety. So you need to start with a pilot who's got plenty of airtime, preferably one who is already experienced with flying photographers, as you are going to be flying low and slow, which is the worst place to be. You have to work pretty fast too – there's little point spending hours on a single shot when you are spending £1,200 per hour.

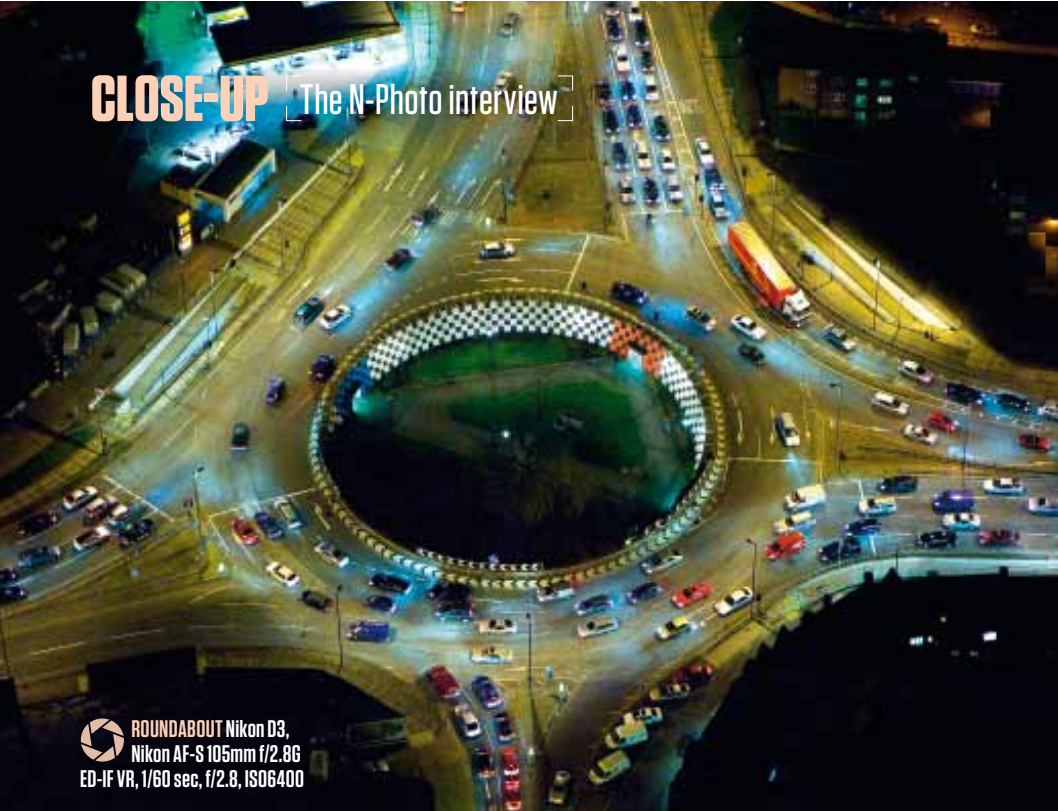
Do you use the same helicopter pilot?

I try to use the same guys whenever possible because they know how I work, but they aren't always available. You have to get a pilot who can understand your ▶

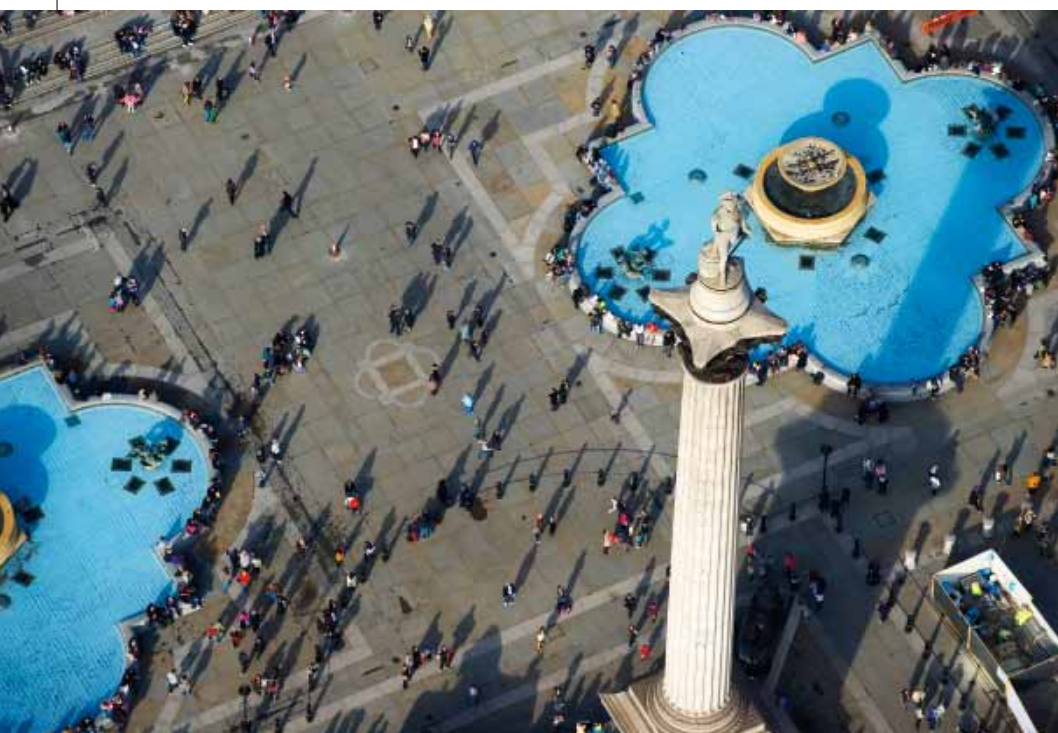
MAZE AT LONGLEAT Nikon D3, Nikon AF-S 70-200mm f/2.8G ED VR, 1/1000 sec, f/3.2, ISO400

“I once landed and went to undo my safety harness, only to find that I'd forgotten to do it up in the first place. I don't think that will happen again!”

Jason Hawkes *Aerial Photographer*



ROUNDABOUT Nikon D3,
Nikon AF-S 105mm f/2.8G
ED-IF VR, 1/60 sec, f/2.8, ISO6400



TRAFALGAR SQUARE Nikon D3s, Nikon AF-S 70-200mm
f/2.8G ED VR, 1/1000 sec, f/4.5, ISO200

directions and get you into the best position for taking pictures.

How do you mean?

Well, I'm giving the instructions of where I want to be, how high and close I want to get, so it's a case of saying, 'up a bit, get a bit closer', that sort of thing. Some pilots get it immediately, but some don't. It can be very frustrating sometimes.

Could you shoot a wedding if you had to?

I shot my brother's wedding about 20 years ago. It was quite fun but I really don't think I would ever do another one.

How do you relax?

I don't really. What do I do to unwind? I don't actually have any spare time – I have three kids!

What are the biggest changes you have seen in your profession and how have they changed what you do?

Well, I started out more than 20 years ago, so I'd have to say the change from film to digital. I was very against the idea at first, but I started using the cameras and worked out a good digital workflow. Now I believe it has changed everything for the better.

HD Movie or stills, what's your preference?

Definitely stills.



THE SHARD Nikon D3s,
Nikon AF-S 14-24mm f/2.8G
ED, 1/640 sec, f/2.8, ISO500

How do you combine shooting film and stills successfully?

You have to hire out a very large rig, and they are extremely expensive, so it's not to be done lightly. I have only just started combining the two, and it's quite uncomfortable in the helicopter as it's now stuffed with so much gear there's very little room left for me.

What has been your greatest moment as a professional?

A very recent event – it happened in August this year. I got the front cover of *National Geographic* with an image I shot of the London 2012 Olympic Park at night. It was a dream come true for me, possibly the most exciting thing that's ever happened ▶



NIGHT AND DAY

Landscapes, cities especially, look totally different when seen by night, and Jason's perfectly placed to photograph this

For most of his career, Jason kept his flying time strictly to daylight hours. But the low-light capability of the latest digital SLR cameras means he is devoting more of his flying time to taking aerial photographs of London and other major cities at night...

What is the ideal time for aerial photography?

■ I am addicted to shooting about 45 minutes after dusk, when the city lights come on.

Do you prefer shooting at night or by day?

■ At the moment, definitely at night. Or, actually, in the very short time between dusk and night, when there is just a tiny amount of colour left in the sky.

How long have you been shooting at night?

■ I first tried it when I was still using film. When I was shooting late in the day and flying back at night, I gave it a try. But the results looked awful, grainy and murky. Digital made shooting at night a reality. The lights and colours are spectacular and there's no issue with noise now.

What is your most successful aerial photograph?

■ They've all been pretty good, I think, and I'm obviously pleased to be on the cover of *National Geographic*, but in my mind, any flight you walk away from is a good flight.



CHRYSLER BUILDING Nikon D3s, Nikon AF-S 70-200mm f/2.8G ED VR, 1/250 sec, f/2.8, ISO1000



CITY OF LONDON Nikon D3,
Nikon AF-S 70-200mm f/2.8G
ED VR, 1/80 sec, f/2.8, ISO3200

in my career, as I absolutely love *National Geographic* magazine.

Did you pitch for the cover?

No. I have had images published in the magazine before, usually once or twice a

“When I was younger I lacked the confidence to push my work... if I were doing it all over again I'd be more confident about promoting myself”

Jason Hawkes *Aerial Photographer*

year, so I know someone on the staff now. They were looking for a suitable picture of the Olympic Stadium to go with the feature they were running, so they thought of me. You don't pitch for *National Geographic*, so it's always a thrill to be published.

And the most embarrassing?

I royally screwed up a job about 18 years ago, shooting a brief from 18,000 feet. It was very cold, we had to wear oxygen masks and the images were rubbish.

What is the biggest lesson you have learnt in your career?

Even after more than 20 years and shooting around 45 books, I still have to pitch for work, and spend a fair amount of time

marketing myself. It's not easy being a photographer, but it's still really good fun.

What makes your photos memorable?

I don't really know, but I am lucky that so many of my clients give me plenty of time in the air to get the right shots.

If young Jason Hawkes was starting out today, would there be anything he would do differently?

I am sure there must be, but only in the last few years have I really got much better at marketing myself. When I was younger I lacked the confidence to push my work. I remember I was absolutely terrified when I was pitching to *Photography* magazine to use my work. If I were doing it all



Jason Hawkes

MALDON MUDFLATS Nikon D3,
Nikon AF-S 70-200mm f/2.8G
ED VR, 1/1000 sec, f/4.0, ISO200



HYDE PARK Nikon D3s,
Nikon AF 50mm f/1.8,
1/1000 sec, f/4.5, ISO250

over again I'd be more confident about promoting myself.

What is the best piece of advice you can give to someone starting out?

Copy American photographer Jim Brandenburg and shoot just one photo per day for 90 days. When you've got an amazing set of images, make sure they are seen, on blogs, in books, magazines... anything and everything. ☑

Jason's latest book, Britain from Above Month by Month, is published by Dorling Kindersley. For more books by Jason, and his latest aerial photos, visit www.jasonhawkes.com

www.nphotomag.com



ESSEX LANDSCAPE Nikon D3,
Nikon AF-S 70-200mm f/2.8G
ED VR, 1/1000 sec, f/2.8, ISO200