

A MARTIN BAILEY PHOTOGRAPHY PUBLICATION

Martin Bailey [on] Photography

Version 1.0

2007

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Biography

Martin Bailey is a semi-professional photographer working from Tokyo, Japan, shooting mainly nature and wildlife, though works in many photographic genres.

Martin was born in 1967, in Nottingham, England. Having bought his first camera at the age of fifteen during a family holiday, he fell in love with Photography. This love was fired furiously after moving to Japan in 1991, and spending most of the last 16 years living in this beautiful country.

A Canon user since his first serious camera bought in 1991, Martin now shoots almost exclusively with digital, and most of his most recent work has been shot with the full sized sensor Canon EOS 5D.

Working from Tokyo because of its centrality and obvious ties to “the day-job”, most shoots take Martin out of the city to the surrounding prefectures north and north-west of Tokyo, and sometimes up to the northern-most island of Japan called Hokkaido, a nature and wildlife wonderland.

In addition to his art, one of Martin’s most notable contributions to the world of Photography is his Podcast. The Martin Bailey Photography Podcast has been published weekly since September 2005, now with archives of more than 100 episodes. The Podcast episodes are downloaded by thousands each month, with total downloads of more than 700,000 as of October 2007.

Martin’s contribution has led to the bringing together of a myriad of photographers from beginner to professional, all sharing information and images via Martin’s Photography Forum and Member’s Galleries. See the [Reference](#) section at the foot of the document for more details.

Rather Listen?

If you’d rather listen to Martin read the main body of this document, listen to MBP Podcast Episode #133 available here: <http://www.martinbaileyphotography.com/podcasts.php?dt=ti&ep=113#Ep113>

I suggest you follow with this document though, as most of the images are only visible here.



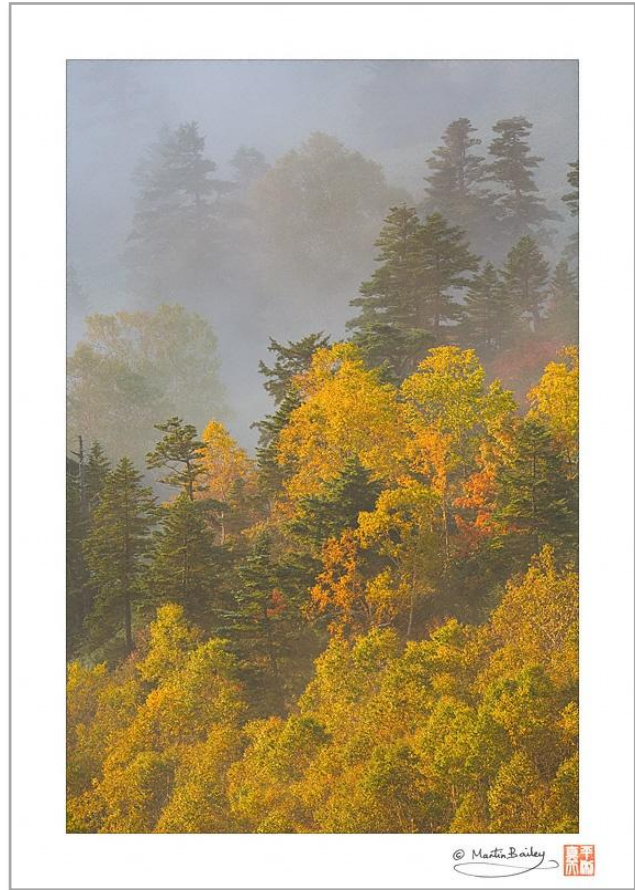


Martin Bailey [on] Photography

What Attracts Me to Photography?

Since I was small I loved to make things. I spent hours drawing, painting or sculpting with Plasticine® (a kind of modelling clay available in the UK). During my school days I hated mathematics. I don't like anything where the teacher can only say "It doesn't matter why you multiply the two numbers in this situation you just do, so remember the formula!" Sure, if I'd had better teachers with the patience to explain how the formula came about it might have been fun, but I wasn't that lucky.

I did enjoy art, metalwork, woodwork, physics and even English language and literature which were more academic than my other favourites, and I paid more attention to all of these subjects, when I wasn't trying to be the centre of attention. These things were either creative, or had formulae and rules attached that I could either understand the explanation, or guess the reasons why it was how it was.



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To me, photography is the amalgamation of art and science. With film or digital it has always been about both the physics of light and mechanics of the equipment, as well as the eye and will of the artist. We can enlarge the aperture and reduce the shutter speed to get the same exposure value, and the aperture used to do so effects our depth of field, which gives us artistic options. I can take 10 minutes to fill the bucket very deliberately through a straw, or smash the water into the bucket in 1/500 of a second with a fire-hose, right? It's the science and physics behind photography coupled with the artist inside of us that we use to create beautiful slices of time. This was one of the many attractions of photography to me.

What motivates me?

I was not a good student when I tried the first time around. (I did OK when I went back to college here in Japan at age 28 to learn Multimedia.) I was though always immensely encouraged when I received even the tiniest amount of praise.

Despite my not being a good student, I have never done anything by halves. I either give it my all, or don't do it at all. My Mum always told me "if a job's worth doing, it's worth doing well". I was profoundly changed by this seeming simple statement. Everything I decide to do gets 100%. I have in fact had to learn to go easy a little on some projects, because I was getting almost compulsive about having everything just right.



In photography I've found something that excites me from a scientific and artistic perspective, and I've become good enough to receive praise for my work. When I see the reaction of the viewer of my photographs, I am encouraged to create more and more. It's the look, or sometimes even the tears in their eyes, or the kind comments I've received from viewers of my work that makes me realize that my mastery of both the science and the art of photography is in some way affecting them, sometimes causing an emotional response. Sometimes people enjoy my work to the point that they buy prints to enjoy the work first hand, hang on their walls or gift to loved ones. This is another huge motivation for me. These things are my drive and what urge me to push the boundaries further, to better my craft and to continue to reach out with my photography.

Painting with Light

As we all know, light is everything in photography. With no light at all, we can't make a traditional photograph (not including infrared etc.). The quality of the light we use governs the end result. I shot the two images below of the same flower bed within minutes of each other. As you can see though, the shot of the left has light pouring into it (through a gap in the trees behind the scene), and the one on the right has just a tiny amount of light hitting the pink flower in the top right third intersection with the rest in total shade.



The feel of the shots is totally different. The image with the direct light has a very warm, late afternoon, maybe even lazy afternoon type mood to it. The almost totally shaded flower bed though has a very pastel colour feel, looking more like it was shot around dawn. This really shows just how much light affects an image, even when shot at pretty much exactly the same time.

I go to great lengths to be at the right place at the right time. Driving through the night or sleeping in the car is not uncommon. Especially in Japan, the sun rises very early, so the morning "golden" time is very early. Getting up early just doesn't cut it because I'm so far away from many of the places of natural beauty that I frequent.

Having said that I don't believe shooting in the harsh midday light is a no-no. We often can't beg and choose, and so have to learn to capitalise on what we have sometimes. With macro work for example bright midday sun is not always a bad thing, so I adjust my goals to suit the time I have to shoot.



Work that Depth of Field

My Old Depth of Field Misconception

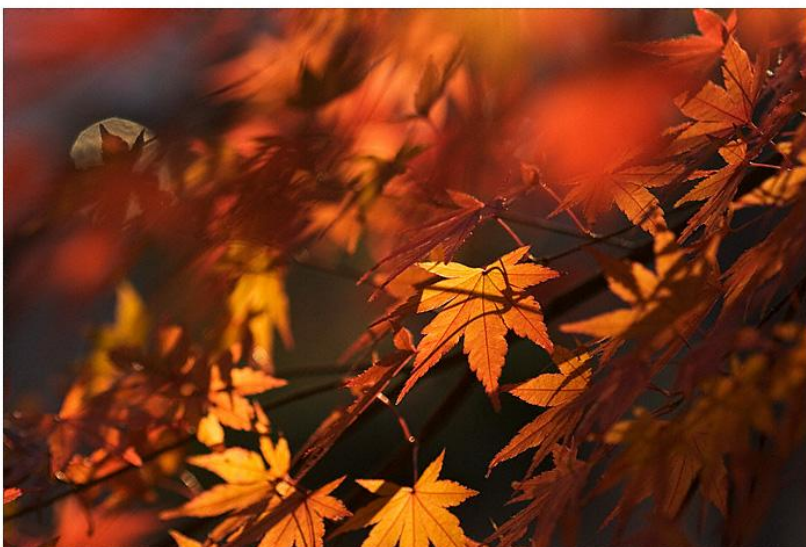
When I started out in photography I was under the misconception that I had to get as much depth of field in my images as possible, regardless of my artistic objectives (or lack of them). Of course there are times when you need as much depth of field as you can get, and I now shoot at hyper-focal distance quite often when doing landscape work just to achieve this, but before I figured out the real artistic uses of depth of field I was obsessive about getting as much in focus as possible.

I shot almost exclusively in Aperture Priority mode, not a bad thing in itself, but my main reason was so that I could adjust the aperture to the smallest possible while watching the resulting shutter speed, just to increase my depth of field as much as possible. Thinking about it I'd probably have been better off shooting in Shutter Priority and setting the lowest speed I thought I'd need and let the camera give me as small an aperture as it could! I now cringe when looking at some of my early photography, due to this misconception.

The Wider the Better

Since I started to experiment with the artistic uses of bokeh (the now Anglicized Japanese word for the out of focus areas of a photograph) a huge proportion of my photography is shot with wide apertures. This started with macro work, but as I am able to add large aperture lenses to my arsenal, this is really taking over my photography and changing my style immensely.

I now tend to think in terms of how wide an aperture I can *get away with*. At first I would shoot from widest to the smallest aperture I could get away with, probably a remnant of my earlier habits. Now though I tend to shoot wide open, and then a few clicks stopped down, and not even bother to cover the smaller apertures as I know I won't use them.



© Martin Bailey 景年

Foreground Bokeh

Placing objects between your camera and your main subject area can help to add depth and additional interest. I tend to keep my eyes open for situations where this will work, but try not to overdo it. Doing this too much would soon become cliché.



Beautiful Backgrounds

Many people think that once the background has been thrown out of focus with a wide aperture it can be forgotten about. This is at best wasting a valuable artistic resource, and at worst, you'll end up with patches of colour or contrast in areas you really didn't want them, and they can really disrupt the composition or flow of your end results. This is especially true when you have stopped a wide aperture lens down some without checking the depth of field with the preview button. This isn't always necessary, but advisable while developing your eye, as stopping down even by one stop puts considerably more shape into your bokeh that can't be seen with the aperture wide open.

Once you get the hang of really *seeing* your bokeh though, you can start to clean up the background and foreground, and then start to use it to add interest to your images by placing patches of colour and light in key areas, and use the bokeh to *paint-in* your background.

Surreal Bokeh

While out shooting these days, I keep an eye out trying to *see* subjects in the shade with bright backgrounds. Then, once again, keeping my eye on the positioning of the elements in the bokeh, I find an exposure somewhere between that necessary for the shade and the bright areas. The results can be incredibly interesting, sometimes even surreal, watercolour-like bokeh.





Proximity

Get in Close

Getting in close to your subject will always add impact and help to remove distracting objects from the surroundings. This is how we edit our image in camera. This goes for all kinds of photography, including Landscapes and Wildlife.

While being careful not to get too close, by keeping your distance and using telephoto lenses, you can still fill the frame with portions of the landscape or wildlife.



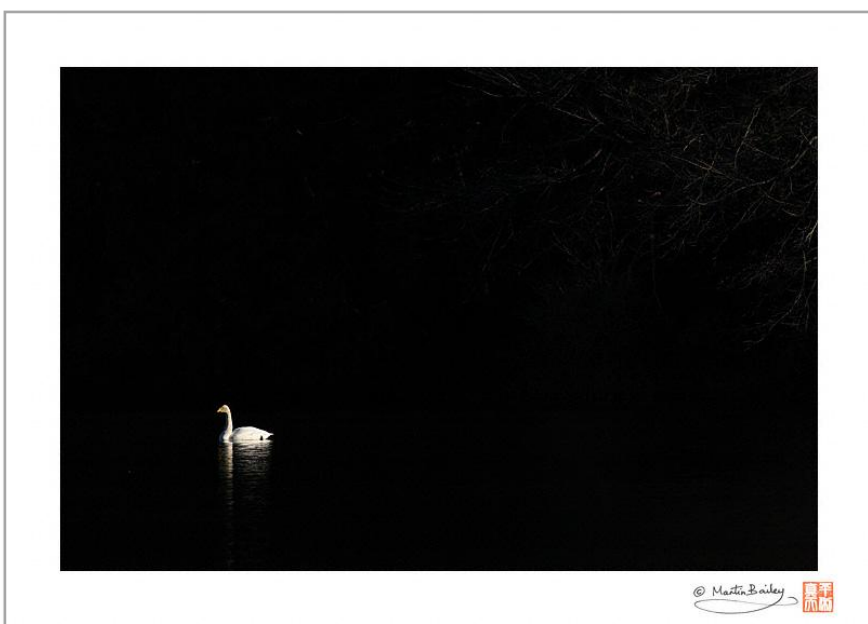
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It's sometimes difficult to know just how much to *crop out* while shooting, but my rule of thumb is to keep everything that's necessary to identify the subject or the scene. Everything else is expendable. People sometimes comment on my work, saying that it would be nice to see the whole scene, or the top of the tree line. What they don't often realize is that by going wider and showing that, you are simply detracting from the main subject, the thing that attracted you to the scene or subject in the first place. In my opinion, it's totally unnecessary to include something that people can guess is there.

Far Away, but Intimately Close

Sometimes quite the opposite is true. You can stay well away from a subject that you might want to

get closer to, but compose the shot in such a way that the surroundings are either totally non-distracting, or a natural environment for your subject.



Isolating your subject in its environment will of course distance you from the subject, but this can actually result in a shot almost as intimate as one in which you can almost feel the warmth of their breath.



Luck and Photography

Plan Your Shoot Times, and Wait for “The Moment”

There is almost always a special moment, or few minutes when the photo is right there for the making. Mist on a lake for example may only be there for 30 seconds, or a few minutes. A quirky pose of a wild animal can last less than a second. Getting to a spot that you’re likely to see your subject and being ready to capture the scene is paramount. Knowing your gear like the back of your hand is important too, so that you don’t fumble the shot in the excitement of the situation.



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I’ve heard people talk about luck in photography as though it’s a dirty word. Some feel that as the *technician* behind the shot, we have total control, and the very thought of an element of luck affecting the outcome is simply outrageous.

This to me is as outrageous as luck having no part in photography. Sure, if you are shooting



household goods for a catalogue in a studio, with total control over the subject and the lighting, then luck won’t come in to it, I agree. Even if you are working with models, children or animals, if the situation is controllable, luck probably plays only a tiny part in your end result. But, if you are shooting nature or natural events, or wildlife, any one of multiple factors can either make or break your photographs.



Of course, planning your shoots at a time of day to get the right quality or direction of light is important. Using information on hand like magazines, the Internet or your own shooting history to time your visit at a certain time of year, say when the autumn leaves are at their best, or a certain type of flower is blooming is necessary. No amount of luck will bring a rose into bloom or autumn leaves on the trees in the middle of February, not in the northern hemisphere at least.

All the best planning and effort on your part though does not guarantee you to get the shot. Mother Nature will always have the last say. We can sometimes make the most of what we get, by switching to shooting in the rain instead of sunshine if that's what happens, and this can give good results too. I actually sometimes head out in the rain just for this, but then if I wanted rain, and the sun shone, I'd be in the reverse situation but the same lack of luck, or should I say cooperation?

Hold Your Post and Don't Listen to Everything People Say

External or available information is important in photography. We can't know what's happening everywhere, and often local information from someone *in-the-know* can be invaluable. Where there's a bird with hatchlings in the nest, or where there is a little known waterfall at the end of a dirt track is information that we must reap or we'd have no idea where to go.

When it comes to nature though, the locals may have as little knowledge as you, as again this can be based mainly on luck.



Drama through a Letterbox

A good example of good fortune through holding my post is when I climbed a mountain that is a few hours away from my Tokyo apartment by car. I was hoping to capture a sunset including the iconic Mount Fuji, which I know is visible from the top of the mountain. (I'd been there before and planned to come back for this someday.) It had become quite cloudy as we approached though and climbed the mountain with my heavy camera gear, so I was thinking that maybe I'd be out of *luck*.

As I reached the summit, there were a few photographers that started packing their gear away and after a short while made their way down the mountain. My better half who was with me at the time turned and said that we were probably out of luck, and should go home. I wasn't ready to quit though. There was a small shack selling drinks and snacks, as this is a popular location, and I went inside and bought a drink, and at the same time asked the guy inside if he thought we'd see Mount Fuji today. "Nah" He said. The clouds had rolled in thick, and we were probably out of luck for today, was his *forecast*.



Still I was not ready to quit. The clouds were thick and it was cold, but I was hoping for a spot of luck. I set up my camera, and waited for a while. My wife was getting cold, and I was thinking that maybe it was a futile exercise, but what the hey, we've spent the afternoon getting here we may as well wait until the sun goes down!

After a while, the clouds started to turn a little red, indicating that the sun was getting lower in the sky. Within minutes the clouds broke and the magnificent form of Mount Fuji presented itself, with the sun also breaking through the clouds forming an incredible fiery red sunset with thick cloud still looming across the top of the sky.

Despite it being a magnificent landscape on a grand scale, it was almost as though I was watching the drama unfold through a letterbox! Needless to say that I felt not only humbled by the beauty of the vista before me, I also felt happy that I'd stuck to my guns. I also of course felt incredibly lucky. Against all odds I was the only person left on the mountain with a camera as everyone warmed by the air conditioning of their cars on their way home, and I have the photographs to prove it. ☺



© Martin Bailey 



Respect your Subjects

I have a deep respect for all living beings, and like to think that this comes through in my work. Every living creature be it flora or fauna, and every piece of earth, rock or body of water that homes it, deserves to be treated with respect. If you treat your subjects with contempt the results will not only show through in your work, but you'll probably end up harming your subject in some way to get your shots.



© Martin Bailey

In macro photography for example, I've heard of people capturing their subjects, killing them and then pinning them in place in order to get a shot of a rare insect looking *natural* on a plant. This is rare, I would hope, but still people are sometimes careless enough to harm the insects or their habitat, which of course is never going to help the creatures we covet on film.

With larger animals, getting too close or stalking them for too

long can affect their behaviour patterns. This can have repercussions on their mating habits too, which again is not really what we want to be doing.

This is a fine line. We need to get relatively close to animals to photograph them. Also, shooting wildlife and publishing our work helps to bring them into the spotlight and helps others to appreciate them, which in turn helps to raise awareness and to some degree can help to protect their environment. So I'm not saying we should not photograph wildlife. I'm saying that when we do, we should treat them with



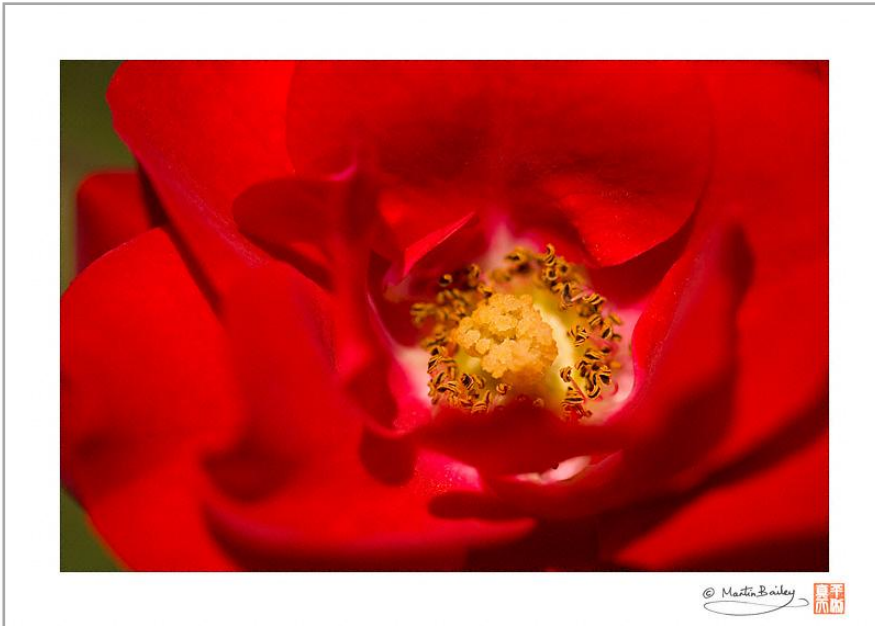
© Martin Bailey

respect, and be careful not to disrupt their behaviour patterns or the environment they depend on. If you really live this, it will start to shine through in your images.



Get it right in camera!

With digital photography making it so much easier to confirm that our exposure is correct I find it totally backwards to not *chimp* (the act of looking at your LCD after shooting a photograph). I agree that this can be taken too far – looking at the LCD after every single image is counter-productive – but I see no reason why we shouldn't use the technology to ensure that our results are what we expect and that the light falls where we intend it to in our histograms.



I'm a huge believer that we should strive to get it right in camera. Just because you can change the exposure or White Balance or a multitude of other settings in Post Processing, it doesn't mean that you should rely on this. Even if you shoot RAW, everything done to your final image is destructive to a degree, even if you don't change the original RAW file. There is a limit to how

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much you can restore detail in blown out highlights, and dragging detail out of shadows only increases the grain.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying I don't use Post Processing to correct mistakes in the field, but I believe it should be used for just that, correcting mistakes, not used as an excuse for sloppy shooting.



Fine Art Prints

I find actually printing out our photographs is an incredibly important step in appreciating our art. People actually hold their prints in physical form so much less now, with the advent of digital. These days we can see a perfect representation on-screen, create amazing slideshows and flick through thumbnails at will on our digital light-boxes, without ever having to create a print.

But when you do print out your work on nice quality paper, especially at A4 or better still A3+ (13x19") sizes, the print really just comes to life. Sure, there are issues of monitor and printer calibration to make sure you get something very close to what you see on your screen, but I find calibrating the monitor regularly and then using printer profiles from the paper manufacturer enable me to get it spot on most of the time, with the odd reprint for predominantly dark subjects.

Just the feeling of one of your *babies* printed out, especially on one of the professional fine art papers, really caps off the whole photography thing for me. It is these prints actually that is my main form of income from photography, especially as penny stock photo agencies increase with more and more people practically giving away their images effectively knocking the bottom out of the stock photography market. Pretty



much all of the images in my online gallery (see the [Reference](#) section below for the address) are available to buy fine art prints of at sizes up to 13x19".

I price my images reasonably, to allow more people the thrill of holding a fine art print without it breaking the bank. It's always a thrill for me too, to receive an email from a happy customer that has just slid one of my prints out of the postage tube and held it in their hand for the first time and experienced the quality and beauty of the print. Quite often they simply can't resist letting me know how this feels, and I'm incredibly grateful for this.



Image Index

The images in this publication were shot in Japan by Martin Bailey. To buy fine art prints of these or many other images, visit Martin's Web site. Jump directly to an image using the links provided or enter the number into the Go To Photo box in the Podcasts menu at www.martinbaileyphotography.com and click the orange button or hit enter.



[#1561](#)
Cosmos Rhapsody #1
Loc: Choufu, Tokyo



[#559](#)
Blurred Foreground Maple Leaves
Loc: Meguro, Tokyo



[#1203](#)
Preening
Loc: Tsurui, Hokkaido



[#1587](#)
Kidoike #1
Loc: Shigakougen, Nagano



[#1438](#)
Night Falls - Tatsuzawa Falls
Loc: Inawashiro, Fukushima



[#1496](#)
3mm Fly
Loc: Minato-Ku, Tokyo



[#1551](#)
Redder Than Red
Loc: Choufu, Tokyo



[#1571](#)
Trees in the Mist #2
Loc: Shibutouge, Nagano



[#1564](#)
Pastel Cosmos #2
Loc: Choufu, Tokyo



[#1392](#)
Watercolour Daffodil
Loc: Hitachinaka, Ibaraki



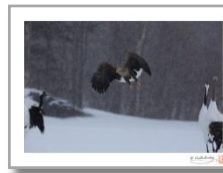
[#831](#)
Lone Swan
Loc: Urizura, Ibaraki



[#929](#)
Ezo Deer
Loc: Shiretoko, Hokkaido



[#827](#)
Drama through a Letterbox
Loc: Fujino, Kanagawa



[#874](#)
Ruler of the Snow Plains
Loc: Akan, Hokkaido



[#1581](#)
Ichinuma (Pond) 2007 #3
Loc: Shigakougen, Nagano



Reference

Contact Martin

Please use the [Contact form](#) at my Web site (see below) or [register](#) on the Photography Forum and either send me an [email](#) or [Private Message](#) via the Forum.

Martin Bailey Photography Web site

The total experience of MBP is centred on the main Web site at the below address:

<http://www.martinbaileyphotography.com/>

Almost all of the images in Martin's Online Gallery are available for purchase as Fine Art Prints. (There are links to the images in this document in the [Image Index](#) above – nudge, nudge! ☺) Just click on the cart button above the images to display the print options below the image. There are question marks by each option to provide help.

You can request a quote for commercial use of the images too, by clicking a link in the buying options.

The Photography Forum

Join in the thriving community at the MBP Photography Forum. We have a great bunch of photographers online from beginner to professional, all of whom share a high level of respect for each other, regardless of their skill level. It's a great place to share your thoughts and improve your photography or help others to improve theirs. Select [Forum](#) from the menu at my Web site to take a look or create your free account by selecting [Register](#) from the Account menu.

<http://www.martinbaileyphotography.com/forum/>

The Podcast

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