

# Camera Recommendations for Wildlife Photography (Summary List)

Steve Hamlin – Worthington Arts Festival, 7/9/2011

## My top picks

What follows is a summarized\* list of compact cameras that, in my opinion, would be good choices for wildlife photography. It shouldn't be considered to be all-inclusive, but rather a starting point for your own investigation. I judged these cameras as a potential buyer might (and as I did when I shopped for my own camera last fall) – basing my picks on available information, including specifications. I have not tested any cameras in the list other than the Panasonic FZ100 that I own. I did research my choices fairly extensively last fall, reading numerous reviews, but time marches on, and new models and refinements have been introduced in the interim.

All information included below (except my brief narratives) was collected from the B&H Photo website ([www.bhphotovideo.com](http://www.bhphotovideo.com)). Bullet points are quoted from that source, so any qualifiers are theirs, not mine. Many terms used are proprietary labels. I make no attempt to explain them – determining their meaning and relative value should be part of your investigation.

B&H is only one of a number of reputable sources for camera equipment, and you should not view this as a recommendation. As with camera selection, you should choose your own camera retailer, based on your own criteria. B&H usually has a very competitive price and their selection is as complete as any retailer. Therefore, I feel comfortable that their selection and pricing represents the overall market very well.

Panasonic [Lumix DMC-FZ100 Digital Camera](#) - \$399.95 (B&H Photo)

- 14.1 Megapixels MOS Sensor
- Leica 25mm Wide Angle 24x Optical Zoom
- 3" Rotating LCD & Electronic Viewfinder
- Optical Image Stabilizer Stills & Movies
- 11 fps Burst Mode at Full Resolution
- High ISO Sensitivity (1600 - 6400)

This is the camera I chose last fall. My chief deciding factors were the lens (Leica brand, very good focal lengths at both ends of the range, good aperture across the zoom range), and the MOS sensor which enables the 11 frames per second burst rate. Another attractive feature that I was unsure of the usefulness of, but which seemed worth trying was the articulating LCD screen. I have found it useful for shots where neither the viewfinder nor a fixed LCD would be available. I used it for an overhead shot with my camera mounted on a tripod where I couldn't get above the camera to look into the viewfinder and where a fixed LCD would have been equally inaccessible.

I didn't care about the 14.1 megapixel resolution – I would have preferred something in the range of 10-12 megapixels (the sensors in these cameras are tiny, and I'm not convinced that anything is gained by cramming more and more pixels onto them). I also didn't care about the video capability, but it may

come in handy at some point. Virtually all current compact cameras have video capture. If it's important to you, this camera still stacks up well against the other cameras in its class.

I've been impressed with the menu and the access to it in use. It is a very sophisticated camera in a small, lightweight package. I bought it for those occasions when my SLR kit is too much baggage, in the hope that it would allow me to capture photo opportunities that require a long, fairly fast lens. It has served very well in that function. I can carry it with me easily and, with a few minor quibbles, it takes very good pictures under a wide range of conditions and of a broad spectrum of subject matter.

Panasonic [Lumix DMC-FZ40 Digital Camera](#) - \$315.83 (B&H Photo)

- 14.1 Megapixels
- 24x 25-600mm (35mm Equiv.) Optical Zoom
- Optical Image Stabilizer Stills & Movies
- High ISO Sensitivity (1600 - 6400)

This was a very close second. The main differences that swung me to the FZ100 are the CCD sensor that limits the burst rate to 1.8 frames per second at full resolution, and the fixed LCD. If burst rate isn't important to you and you think the fixed LCD will serve you fine, this should be an excellent camera at a very good price.

Other frontrunners:

Fujifilm [Finepix HS20EXR Digital Camera \(Black\)](#) - \$424.95 (B&H Photo)

- 16MP Back Side Illuminated CMOS Sensor
- 3" 460K Resolution LCD
- 30x Optical Zoom (24-720mm Equiv.) Lens
- Tracking Auto Focus

This camera had not been introduced when I made my selection. I don't think it would have altered my choice.

Fujifilm [Finepix S3200 14MP Digital Camera \(Black\)](#) - \$199.95 (B&H Photo)

- 14 Megapixel Resolution
- 24x Zoom W/Wide-Angle 24-576mm Lens
- Large 3" LCD, at 230K Resolution
- Dual Image Stabilization
- Tracking Auto Focus (AF)

Fujifilm [Finepix S4000 14MP Digital Camera \(Black\)](#) - \$232.95 (B&H Photo)

- 14 Megapixel Resolution
- 30x Zoom W/Wide-Angle 24-720mm Lens
- Large 3" LCD, at 230K Resolution
- Dual Image Stabilization
- Tracking Auto Focus (AF)

This camera was a contender. I ended up choosing the FZ100 because, like the FZ40, this camera has a CCD sensor that limits the burst rate. From available reviews, it appeared that the advertised burst rate

was overstated and the camera couldn't live up to it under real world conditions. As I stated earlier, I also chose the FZ100 based on its Leica lens with its combination of relatively large aperture and comfortable focal length range.

Canon [PowerShot SX30 IS Digital Camera](#) - \$399.99 (B&H Photo)

- 35x Zoom Lens (24-840mm Equivalent)
- 14.1MP High Resolution
- 2.7" Wide Vari-angle LCD Display
- Optical Image Stabilizer for Sharp Pix
- Lithium-ion Rechargeable Batteries

Nikon [Coolpix P500 Digital Camera \(Black\)](#) - \$399.95 (B&H Photo)

- 12.1MP CMOS Sensor
- 36x Wide-Angle 22.5-810mm Lens
- 5fps at Full 12.1MP Resolution
- 3" Vari-Angle Hi Res 921K-Dot Display
- Sensitivity Up to 3200 ISO
- 5-Way VR Image Stabilization

## Other useful review sites

<http://reviews.cnet.com/digital-cameras/>

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

<http://www.safari-guide.co.uk/>

<http://www.digitalcamera-hq.com/>

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

\*In an attempt to limit the length of this document, I've edited out some of the bullet points that I considered either irrelevant to wildlife photography (such as scene modes, red-eye detection, and video-related features), or fairly consistent among all listed cameras (such as quality processors). For the full list of features of any of these cameras, please see the B&H website or other review sites.