



Article

Tripod & Head for Nature Photography

by Alan YEO

Category: Technique

Which tripod and ball head are recommended for nature photography?



It never ceases to amaze me how some photographers can complain about having to lug along a tripod when out shooting. I have always considered the tripod as part of the system which allows me to produce sharp images. A tripod should be considered an essential tool for the nature photographer.

Gitzo Carbon Fiber Mountaineer 1329 with Arca Swiss B1

If you have yet to get a tripod, now is the time to do so. But what should I look for in a tripod? There are many different brands of tripods and models to choose from. For the nature photographer, my recommendations would be to look for a tripod that is sturdy enough to support your biggest setup. No point having a tripod that wobbles at the lightest of load. What you need is a sturdy support so as to ensure the sharpest possible images. Most tripod have specifications indicating the maximum load it can take before all hell break loose. So if your heaviest camera and a lens combination is 5 kg, get a tripod that can hold a load of at least 8 kg. I would recommend a higher load if possible but I don't want you to overkill.

Next check if your tripod can be setup to go low, like the one pictured on the right. This capability comes in handy if you need to shoot from a low angle. Remember, not everything should be shot at eye level. Many tripods cannot go too low because the centre column is in the way. Be mindful of this. The other important factor to consider when choosing a tripod is the maximum extended height. It is always preferable to get a tripod that can be extended to your eye level. Why? Because stooping low to look at your viewfinder for any extended period of time is not exactly pleasant - especially for your back. I know that this usually means a bigger and heavier tripod. I guess you have to decide for yourself what is best without compromising too much. If weight is a big issue, I would recommend one of those carbon fiber tripods from Gitzo. There are other brands offering carbon fiber tripods but the best I have tried is from Gitzo. Carbon fiber tripods are expensive to say the least, but they are light in weight and offer exceptional stability.



Previous months

- » [Photographing Arizona's Landscape](#)
By Frederick Lee
- » [Predatory Nature of Jumping Spiders](#)
By Tan Chuan-Yean
- » [Barbet brood successfully raised](#)
By Graeme GUY; photographer: Pok Zin
- » [Birds in My Backyard - Punggol 21](#)
By James WONG
- » [The Joys of Bird Photography](#)
By FONG Chee Wai
- » [Black Shouldered Kites, Episode 3.](#)
By Hilary HOE
- » [India: Keoladeo and Rathambore Parks](#)
By Graeme GUY
- » [REVERSE LENS - Back to the Old Way!](#)
By Edsel ROMERO
- » [Nocturnal delight - Giant Flying Squirrel](#)
By Fong Chee Wai
- » [Pulau Kukup Trip \(NPS field trip, 16th October, 2004\)](#)
By Graeme Guy
- » [Yellow Vented Bulbul.....The Local Commoner](#)
By D. HO
- » [Markins M10 Ballhead Review](#)
By Aaron LEUNG
- » [Baya Weavers - supreme architects and builders](#)
By Graeme GUY
- » [Dragonfly Photography - Field Guide](#)
By Edsel ROMERO
- » [Singapore's Fabulous Kites, Part 2](#)
By V. Quek, G. Guy, D. Ho
- » [Singapore's Fabulous Kites, Part 1](#)
By V. Quek, G. Guy, D. Ho
- » [Sri Lanka: Around the Waterholes and Down the Roads](#)
By Graeme GUY
- » [Total Solar Eclipse - 4th December 2002](#)
By David BROADHEAD
- » [Nikkor AFS VR 70-200f2.8G ED-IF Review - Updated!](#)
By Dennis HO
- » [Keoladeo Ghana National Park, India](#)
By David BEHRENS
- » [The Ospreys of Rottnest Island - Part 2 of 2](#)
By Graeme GUY
- » [The Ospreys of Rottnest Island - Part 1 of 2](#)
By Graeme GUY
- » [Macro Photography - Not Just About Getting Close](#)
By YEO Wee Han
- » [Africa's Best](#)
By John MILBANK
- » [Flash as Main Light](#)

Left to Right : Pan/Tilt Head & Arca Swiss B1 Ballhead

But what good is a tripod without a good head? Which brings me to the issue of getting a suitable head for your tripod. Most photographers are acquainted with the pan and tilt head. This type of head usually comes with three handles in which you can pan and/or tilt your camera. While the pan and tilt heads are suitable for some situations, for nature photographers, I would strongly suggest getting a good ballhead. Most serious nature photographers would acknowledge that the best ballhead comes from Arca Swiss. The Arca Swiss B1 pictured here is relatively small and is an excellent head even for a heavy lens like the 600mm f4. The main advantages of a ballhead over a pan and tilt head are stability and its ease of operation. With the ballhead, you need only turn one tension knob and your camera and lens setup can swivel to point at any direction. Turn the same knob to lock the setup and you are ready to fire away. It is that easy.

Don't get me wrong. I am not saying that only Arca Swiss ballheads are the way to go. There are many brands like Studioball, Foba and Kirk that make good ballheads. I am particularly in favour of the Foba Mini-Superball with quick-release from Switzerland. This ballhead has a safety plug to prevent the camera/lens from sliding off. In Singapore, the Foba Mini-Superball retails for about half the price of the Arca Swiss B1.

Before I forget, don't get a ballhead that is so miserably small for your setup. The same principle applies when choosing a suitable tripod and ballhead. Get the one that can take your maximum load and more.

Happy shooting.

916209

Copyright© 2002-2008 Nature Photography Society (Singapore). All rights reserved.
Developed by ttokim@qo.com, modified and maintained by [Aaron Leung](#).

By Arthur MORRIS

» [D-60 Review](#)

By Aaron LEUNG

» [Africa for Beginners](#)

By John MILBANK

» [A Whale of a Time](#)

By Tony WU

» [Singapore Botanic Gardens](#)

By Alex YAP

» [Taking Scenics in Nepal](#)

By Dennis HO

» [Photographing Butterflies at Sentosa Butterfly Park](#)

By GAN Cheong Weei

» [A Year Of Australian Wildlife Photography](#)

By Jim THOMSON

F.R.P.S. F.A.P.S.

» [Ding Darling Wildlife Refuge](#)

By Graeme GUY

» [Nikon 80-400 VR – a versatile lens for nature photography](#)

By FONG Chee Wai

» [Backyard of discovery](#)

By John MILBANK

» [Underwater Photography](#)

By POH Liong Kiat

» [Shooting Herons](#)

By FONG Chee Wai

» [D-30 Dreams](#)

By Graeme GUY

» [Finding Reptiles and Amphibians - a few tips](#)

By Nick BAKER

» [Butterfly Shooting](#)

By KHEW Sin Khoon

» [Mandai Orchid Gardens](#)

By Alex YAP

» [Tripod & Head for Nature Photography](#)

By Alan YEO