

## Andrea Zampatti: A Wildlife Photographer in his own words

In love since childhood with wildlife and nature, it is during the Academy studies that I decide to pursue photography in the wild wonders that every day occur in the eyes of those who love and observe them. Although as a child my attention was focused on insects, my passion is now directed mainly towards mammals and birds, with a special attraction for the species of the Northern (Boreal) hemisphere: the Great North has always aroused strong emotions in me. In fact, my future perspective is to explore and photograph its cold and remote wilderness and its fascinating inhabitants.

But for now I have to settle and enjoy the benefits of places within reach, and for this - without any regret - I have focused particularly on the fauna of Italy and a few other European countries.

Italy, especially in the North and despite the overwhelming and often sickening urbanization, still retains certain areas of extreme beauty and importance, as in the Alps and some

lacustrine areas, where I often find myself to escape from that tenor of life that too often strangles me. Prerogative of my work is the attempt to place on the same level the aesthetic and the naturalistic visions, fields in which the emotional and ethical involvement become an essential ingredient. Photographing a wild animal in the end becomes - after being a patient and friendly challenge to the subject - a burning desire for knowledge and conservation of the fragile and fascinating biodiversity of our planet.

Although my main passion is wildlife, I can't deny enjoying, when conditions dictate it for its beauty, also photographing landscapes, especially those of my beloved Alps. I use Nikon equipment and I don't own very expensive camera bodies or lenses: I firmly believe that the equipment can aid only in small part the work of a photographer, though I admit that in difficult situations a good lens or camera can make a difference.



# European Emotions

My name is Andrea Zampatti and I live in Brescia, in Northern Italy, where I was born in 1985. I work in the graphic and photography fields as I'm also professor of graphics, digital photography and photo-editing at the Academy of Brescia (LABA- Libera Accademia di Belle Arti).

**Autumn Palette - Italian Pre-Alps**

*Nikon D40 – Nikon 18-55@55mm – 1/40s f/8.0 ISO400*

My main intent was to photograph a friendly dipper which lived close to a mountain stream. The day was gray and rainy, it wasn't certainly the best for a bird which doesn't stand still for a moment, and after several failed attempts I decided to dismantle the hide and go home. Luck had me to be at the apex of the autumn season: the mixed forests and the surrounding mountains coloured the landscape with a myriad of beautiful colours. I returned many times afterwards but I've not been able to find those same autumn colours again!

**European Bee-eater**  
***Merops apiaster***  
**Northern Italy**

*Nikon D300s – Nikon  
300f4+tc1.7 (510mm) –  
1/320s f/8.0 ISO400*

The European Bee-eater is a magnificent multicolored bird which nests in crowded and noisy colonies on sandbanks, usually on the banks of rivers, lakes or wetlands. It is a favourite subject of wildlife photographers, and it's always a joy to see them come back every spring. Hidden in a bush, an alternative to the hide - bugs aside - I took this picture without the subject noticing me at all.





**Baby Hazel Dormouse *Muscardinus avellanarius* - Northern Italy**

*Nikon D40 – Nikon 55-200@200mm – 1/100s f/5.6 ISO200*

The Hazel or Common Dormouse is a small and pleasant mammal that is the only living species in the genus *Muscardinus*. Given its nocturnal nature it's not easy to observe it in the wild, but I have to admit that in this case I was really lucky!

The little creature was peacefully standing on the top of a yarrow; I always ask myself how he managed to get there. I asked him to smile for a couple of shots...and I was immediatly repaid!



**Great Egret *Casmerodius albus* - Northern Italy**

*Nikon D300s – Nikon300f4+tc1.7 – 1/500s f/7.1 ISO640*

The Great White Heron is the largest heron present in Europe. I photographed this specimen in its favorite hunting environment -at the edge of the reed banks - during a warm Spring sunset, which illuminated only the foremost reed curtain, painting beautiful reflections on the calm surface of the bog.



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**Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea***  
**Northern Italy**

*Nikon D40 – Sigma 120-400@400mm  
1/250s f/5.6 ISO400*

The Grey Heron is undoubtedly a common subject, although in Italy it is not as confident as in other Countries, where I could easily get within touching distance to them!

This specimen had made a “dance step” as it was landing right in front of my hide, and I was able to immortalize it in an elegant and dynamic pose. The lovely autumn-green did the rest.

**Biebrza River – North-Eastern Poland**

*Nikon D300s – Nikon 55-200@80mm – 1/40s f/14.0 ISO500*

The Biebrza river and its valley are fantastic both in terms of landscape and wildlife features. The presence of wild animals is very high, both in mammals and birds. I shot this picture of the Biebrza river at sunset, near the village of its same name, in the last few days when its surface was still completely frozen



**Common Red Squirrel**  
***Sciurus vulgaris***  
**Swiss Alps**

*Nikon D300s – Nikon 300 f4 –  
1/100s f/4.0 ISO640*

The Red Squirrel is the elf of the woods and every time its appearance - often fleeting - gives us moments of great joy and amazement: watching one run up and down from the pine trees jumping from one peak to another always leaves one stunned!

It sometimes happens that some individuals are very curious to observe people for a moment, giving the opportunity to take some pictures. The specimen in this photo has the peculiarity of a dark fur in winter, which contrasts both the name and the common general idea of this species.






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**Red Deer *Cervus elaphus* stag – England**

*Nikon D300s – Nikon 300f4 – 1/640s f/4.5 ISO400*

The Red Deer is without doubt my favourite mammal: I think seeing an adult male showing off its huge antlers in the wilderness can be one of the most touching scenes a lover of nature and animals can witness, particularly during the rut. This beautiful male, after a refreshing and healthy swim in the mud, moves at sunset to reach the rest of the herd with which he will spend the night.

**Fallow Deer *Dama dama* - England**

*Nikon D300s – Nikon 300f4 – 1/250s f/4.5 ISO500*

Among the non-native unguulates there is the European Fallow Deer, introduced in ancient times and now well spread across most of Europe. It adapts well to different types of habitats and can be found from the lowlands to the highlands. One of its main features is the dappled coat, though often one can see albino or melanistic specimens. This female, after seeing me, ran away to a grove of ferns, hoping not to be seen but... the eye of a wildlife photographer is well trained!





**Fighting Hares *Lepus lepus* – Northern Italy**

*Nikon D300s – Nikon 300 f4+tc1.7 – 1/6.7 ISO640*

Watching the fights between hares is always fascinating. I was in the fields adjacent to the shores of a large river, waiting for roe deers and, of course, hares. When the very first light of dawn began to light up the fields in the distance, I saw a hare and I tried to approach it without being seen. At one point another hare jumped out of the grass and led itself with three long hops in front of the other: a few seconds of intense gaze and then... the battle began!



**Reed Bunting**  
***Emberiza schoeniclus***  
**Northern Italy**

*Nikon D300s – Nikon 300f4+tc1.7 – 1/400s f7.1 ISO400*

Surely to be a wildlife photographer one requires a good dose of patience, preparation, knowledge of animals and many other things... but sometimes also a little bit of extra luck.

The Reed Bunting is a bird that lives mainly in the thick reeds of the lake or its marshes. While I was in my hide waiting for a Bittern, this specimen was resting on a branch which seemed placed there on purpose, giving me a picture with an almost pictorial background.

**Moose *Alces alces***  
**North-Eastern Poland**

*Nikon D300s – Nikon 300f4 – 1/400s f/4.0 ISO800*

One of the symbols of the Great North is by far the largest deer that exists on earth, the majestic Moose. Despite the European Moose being much smaller than the American one, I must admit that only approaching this animal physically you can understand its true size.

Despite this, and despite its well-known character, defensive and protective towards its young, the moose dismisses any fear with its kindly expression. In reality, however, in the northern Countries there are more victims of moose mothers than grizzly bears! So... caution!

This young female was photographed in a beautiful pine forest in the Biebrza Valley.



**Pied Stilts *Himantopus himantopus*  
under the storm - Northern Italy**

*Nikon D300s – Sigma 120-400@400mm - 1/250s f/6.3 ISO1000*

That morning, while I was sitting in my hide close to a swamp, I had a thought that troubled me: "It's not possibile I'm here, in a hide at 100 kilometers from home, when I could be on Texel Island, a paradise for bird photography!"

The plane that was supposed to take me had decided not to take off, because the damn Eyjafjöll volcano had erupted in Iceland! My moral collapsed further when grains of hail as big as golf balls started to fall from the sky. I focused, trying to make the most of these conditions... and with a little hope I snapped a picture that is without a doubt one of my favourites images!



**Sunset in the Saline - Northern Italy**

*Nikon D300s - Sigma 120-400@400mm - 1/25s f/5.6 ISO800*

On the Delta of the Po river, the most important and largest Italian one, photo opportunities are many. Along the canals, ponds, and salt marshes gather thousands of birds, especially herons, waders, ducks, geese and seagulls. That evening, the waning sunset tinged the water of the salt marshes that were packed with life with a pink color. On the arrival of a hawk, thousand of birds started flying away creating swirling textures of every shape and color. I tried to give the idea of the tumult with a dynamic shot, a mix between panning and blur.





**Marmot**  
***Marmota marmota***  
**Italian Alps**

Nikon D300s – Nikon  
300f4+tc1.7 (510mm)  
1/640s f/8.0 ISO400

During walks in the Alps  
it's common hearing strong  
whistles echoing in  
the valleys.

It's the alarm call of the  
marmot, a very nice alpine  
rodent which is not too  
difficult to observe in the  
spring and summer.  
After the winter defrost,  
the puppies leave the den  
at last, after the long winter  
hibernation; it's beautiful  
to watch them chase each  
other madly in the  
meadows and when they  
exchange effusions, as in  
the picture taken a few  
meters from the entrance  
of the burrow.

**Alpine Chamois**  
***Rupicapra rupicapra***  
**Italian Alps**

Nikon D7000  
Nikon 300f4  
1/1250s f/7.1 ISO500

As I'm a mountain lover  
I'm a lover of the king of  
the rocks as well, the  
Chamois, a mammal well  
spread over almost  
the entire Alps.  
We can observe it  
perform amazing  
stunts on rocky  
ledges, spine-chilling  
scenes that give  
a stomach-ache even  
to the strongest  
of rock climbers!

During a trek in the  
mountains I took this  
picture of a beautiful adult  
female which was warming  
up with the very first light  
of dawn after a cold night.



**Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* – Italian Alps**

*Nikon D300s – Sigma 120-400@120mm –  
1/250s f/7.1 ISO400*

Heavily persecuted, in Italy the Red Fox is a particularly elusive and shadowy mammal. To see it is not that simple, photographing it even less. But there are some places, as in this case the Gran Paradiso National Park, in the north-east of the Italian Alps, where the foxes have become accustomed to the presence of tourists - and when they want (during five visits I photographed them only once) - they will leave you free to quietly approach and photograph them.

In this beautiful winter day where the valley was covered by a thick blanket of snow, I was from morning to evening in the company of this magnificent specimen, which posed for me like a star!





**The King of the Lek, Black Grouse *Tetrao tetrix* – Italian Alps**

*Nikon D300s – Nikon 300f4+tc1.7 – 1/1250s f/6.7 ISO400*

The Black Grouse is without doubt one of my favourite subjects. Every year, between April and May, this magnificent alpine grouse performs fascinating mating parades and fierce fights to earn its right to breed with the females of the lek. Hard work and dedication are required to witness such scenes, but the show is guaranteed almost always.