

Gerlach Nature Photography

May 10-16 or May 17-23 or May 24-30, 2020

HUMMINGBIRDS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOP

www.gerlachnaturephoto.com

With John Gerlach, Dixie Calderone, and Scott Bechtel



Figure 1 The male rufous hummingbird dives in to sip sugar water. By shooting thousands of images, capturing a pose like this is possible. This action is so fast that you don't see this pose until you view your images.

Join John Gerlach, Dixie Calderone, and Scott Bechtel for an exceptional hummingbird photography workshop experience at the secluded Bull River Guest

Ranch that lies in a small valley amid the spectacular snow-covered Canadian Rockies.

Learn to photograph hummingbirds with multiple flash and natural light using cutting-edge techniques we develop and continue to improve.

How this workshop Happened

I looked for the perfect place to conduct hummingbird photography workshops beginning in 1998, and finally found Bull River in May of 2003. I considered all the known hummer hotspots in Arizona and New Mexico. While some were promising, I rejected all for various reasons.

I did not expect to find the perfect place in southeastern British Columbia. It all began while leading a polar bear photography tour. During a relaxing evening with my group, the conversation drifted to hummingbirds. One of my participants said, “my husband and I own the Bull River Guest Ranch that attracts hundreds of hummingbirds in May and June. The birds flock to our guest ranch to feed at the sugar water feeders, and at dusk, every feeder is swarming with hummingbirds like bees at a hive.” That statement started all this!



Figure 2 In addition to multi-flash, enjoy natural light opportunities. This male rufous hummingbird perched on everything we put out for him and he let us photograph him from only a few feet away!

I taught my first two hummingbird workshops at Bull River in 2003 and every year since. The photo opportunities are remarkable! The only complaint I hear is “how do I select the best hummingbird poses from the thousands of excellent images I am shooting?” In 2019, my clients averaged more than 20,000 images per person, and the all-time high is 65,000 plus set by “Machine-gun Melanie” with her Olympus mirrorless camera.

Hummingbirds are site specific. They fly the same migration pattern year after year and return to the Bull River Guest Ranch each May. The arrival time does not seem to vary. Most of the hummingbirds arriving at Bull River already know my photography stations and are comfortable with humans and flashes. In the evening, hold your hand over the feeder perches and soon hummingbirds perch on your hand. John Gerlach holds the record with 9 hummingbirds perched on his hands at once! Feel free to attempt a new record!



Figure 3 In the evening, often two hummingbirds visit the feeder simultaneously! Here is a pair of rufous hummingbirds sharing the feeder! Surely you would like to make similar images!

I have nine multi-flash stations set up, plus some natural light opportunities. Hummingbirds are most active at the flash stations from 9am to noon, and between 3pm till dark. The last four hours before dark are especially productive. In the evening, they converge on our hummingbird stations. All flash stations are covered with a tent to protect you and your photo gear from rain. And surprisingly enough, rain and cold produce astonishing shooting opportunities as hummingbirds swarm the feeders all day during bad weather! This may be the only photo workshop you ever attend where bad weather is great weather for wildlife photography!

Since I may have up to twelve participants, I have at least nine stations set up, and use the six most productive stations. Clients rotate through the stations as each are unique with different backgrounds, flowers, and feeder positions. When not on a flash station, you always have natural light stations to use anytime!

Every client has three 1.5 hour periods on the flash stations each day. You can expect to shoot about 4,000 images during your three daily sessions, and you will get a station that is especially hot where you shoot more than 3,000 images in only 90 minutes! That is more than 30 shots per minute. And if you think you can't properly expose hummingbirds at that rate with flash, remember, we are highly-skilled cutting-edge hummingbird photographers who found a way to do it.

The three species of hummingbirds living at Bull River are the adorable calliope (45%), crimson rufous (45%), and charming black-chinned (10%). During the workshop, you shoot numerous images of all three - males and females alike. As the breeding season is happening, all are wearing striking breeding plumage!



Figure 4 Calliope Hummingbird



Figure 5 Rufous Hummingbird



Figure 6 Black-chinned Hummer

What You Will Learn?

- This is an incredible immersion into the lives of hummingbirds. Learn to identify rufous, calliope, and black-chinned hummingbirds. Watch their courtship flights right above you, how they battle for feeder superiority, and many other behaviors.
- How to photograph hummingbirds with four-flash multi-flash setups using short flash durations to freeze wings, or long flash durations to blur wings.
- How to photograph hummingbirds with natural light in flight and perched.



Figure 7 Bright overcast and no wind is perfect for natural light hummingbird photography. Here is a male rufous hummingbird on the ranch owner's deck that you have full access to all week.

- Learn every part of the multi-flash setup and how to do it on your own. You get the benefit of John's twenty years of improving the hummingbird flash stations as he continually develops new strategies. New equipment that has become available allows us to advance the art and science of hummingbird photography.

- Learn to use your camera gear to best advantage! Using the best autofocus practices, AF microadjusting your lens and camera, exposure, composition, and more are all part of this course. During the hummingbird quiet time of noon to 3pm, we enjoy a group lunch and then John conducts instructional programs after lunch.
- Learn the art of hummingbird photography. Learning to work with flowers, backgrounds, and hiding the sugar water are all part of hummingbird photography. We have at least 40 different backgrounds to choose from in various colors and if you would like to try some artistic shots with white backgrounds, we are happy to help you do that.

Group Size

Limited to only twelve photographers. Non-participating spouses and friends are encouraged to join us, and many do. Non-participants can join us for everything we do, except photograph hummingbirds at our stations as that is reserved for participants.

Viewing Your Photos

We view your digital images on a high-definition TV. We hope you bring up to 15 images from home to share, and perhaps share 15 hummingbird images you shoot at the ranch Friday night. It is easiest if you give us your JPEG images on a jump drive so we can load them into the slide program. It is optional, of course, but fun to do.

What Photo Gear do you Need?

We provide all the flash gear. All you need is your camera that has a flash hotshoe on top (that includes most cameras). It is wise to bring a second back-up camera too.

We do all our flash photography without a blind from only six feet or less. John's favorite combination is the Canon 1DX Mark II, Canon 200-400mm lens with a 25mm extension tube to make the lens focus a little closer for the small calliope hummingbirds. A Nikon 200-400mm lens is terrific too. Many lenses work! The key is it is helpful to have a reasonably fast lens of at least f/5.6 that is 300mm or longer and can focus close enough to fill the image with a 3 x 4 inch subject. Often you need an extension tube of about 25mm to focus close enough.



Figure 8 This male calliope hummingbird "owned" a group of bushes that he vigorously protected from all others. Using natural light, my group members shot at least 20,000 images of him from ten feet away. I shot this image with a Canon 600mm lens, 1.4x teleconverter, and 25mm extension tube. The whole combo is AF microadjusted to +5.

Image Storage

Bring plenty of image storage space! If you edit your photos on a computer, then you can delete many of the inferior images shot during the day to make room for more images. Since you don't see the position of a hummingbird's wings when you shoot, many photos are deleted because the wings are in a poor spot. Conversely, flash at short power levels freezes all motion so if the focus is accurate, your image is sharp, and exposure is super easy too. External hard drives of 1TB are inexpensive and splendid for storage. Using high-capacity memory cards in the camera is wise. I use 128GB CF cards by SanDisk.

Bring a tripod. The tripod does not need to be heavy, since flash produces sharp images even when handholding the camera. However, you want the tripod to hold the camera while you wait for the hummingbird's arrival. A ballhead with a Wimberley sidekick or a Wimberley gimbal head is super for all wildlife photography and that includes hummingbirds.

What is the typical day like?

8:00 am - Group Breakfast

8:30 am – The warming sun makes the hummingbirds more active

9:00 am - First morning shift begins at their flash stations

10:30 am - Second morning shift begins

12:30 - Group Lunch

1:30 – Teaching program presented

3:00 pm – First afternoon shift begins

4:30 pm – Second afternoon shift begins

6:00 pm – Third afternoon shift begins

7:30 pm – Fourth afternoon shift begins

Note: Since late in the day is the prime time for hummingbird action, we split the dinner time. The group that begins at 4:30 pm and ends at 6pm eats dinner at 6pm and is on again at 7:30 pm. If your scheduled time for a flash station is 6 pm, then you eat dinner at 5pm. This shooting schedule rotates each day.

9:15 or so – Hummingbird photography ends when you lose autofocus, because without autofocus, you don't get sharp images.

The flash stations are mostly between two cabins where there are many bushes for “hummingbird cover” and on several of the cabin porches. Walking is minimal.



Figure 9 Male rufous hummingbird with four flashes at 1/64th power.



Figure 10 Editing thousands of images takes time. John teaches how he sorts through several hundred images per hour to find the best! The wings and body position make this a pleasing pose of a female rufous hummingbird.

Meals

The ranch hires a chef to cook for our hungry group of hummingbird photographers. The meals are delicious. We enjoy a group breakfast at 8 a.m. each morning Monday through Saturday. On Monday through Friday, the group lunch is at 12:30 p.m. and dinners are served in shifts due to the hummingbird photography schedule. Some eat at 5 p.m. and others at 6 p.m.

Workshop Fees (in US dollars)

Single Occupancy (1 person/1 cabin) \$2700 for one person

Includes single supplement for cabin

Double Occupancy (2 people/1 cabin) \$2100 each person

Both are participants

Double (2 people/1 cabin) \$3180 for both

One participant and one non-photographer spouse or friend. Meals for both are included.

What is Included:

- Six nights lodging (Sunday-Friday night) at the Bull River Guest Ranch
- 16 scrumptious meals beginning with breakfast Monday morning and ending with breakfast on Saturday
- The use of all flash gear
- John's detailed notes on hummingbird photography, plus several other photography articles.
- Unlimited help with your photography from John, Dixie, and Scott
- The opportunity to shoot so many images that you will wear your camera out. For those who try every time they have a session on a flash station, and work the natural light stations too, it is possible to shoot more than 40,000 images. Perhaps someone will beat Melanie's record of 65,000 in a single week.
- John's detailed explanation on the best way to set up a flash station that he demonstrates on Monday morning after breakfast. We will assemble a station piece by piece.

What is not included:

- Transportation to the ranch
- Special drinks not provided with meals
- Any other personal costs

Tips for the Ranch Staff

We believe in giving tips for a job well done and the staff at Bull River is amazing. Bring about \$80 for tips (single person is \$80, and a couple is \$160 of course). We pool tips and give a group tip to the staff. John, Dixie, and Scott don't accept tips, but should a glass of wine appear in front of us – we don't turn it down.

Non-photographer Spouse or Friend

Non-photographers are encouraged to attend the workshop. The cabins and the bunkhouse are wonderfully comfortable, and the porches are great for enjoying the view and hummingbirds. Bull River is a magnificent place to enjoy nature, read, or relax. Many non-photographer spouses join us, all have a splendid time at Bull River, and may participate in the activities during the week. They only do not photograph hummingbirds on the flash stations that are reserved for participants only.



Figure 11 The lady black-chinned hummingbird is the most elegant of the ones we have at Bull River. She is sweet, does not fight, and continually spreads her tail and flips her wings producing a higher percentage of nice poses than all others. Notice I made the backlight flash stronger to make the wings glow more!

Workshop Location

(Note: Do not follow GPS or you will “enjoy” far more adventure than you bargained for.)

Bull River Guest Ranch in the Canadian Rockies

Greg & Gina Koch

P.O. Box 133 Station Main

Cranbrook, BC Canada

VIC-4H7

Tel 250-429-3760

E-mail info@bullriverguestranch.com

www.bullriverguestranch.com



Figure 12 A workshop member photographs hummingbirds with four flashes, a hummer feeder hidden behind flowers, and a background. I think you should be in that chair next year. Can you see the two hummingbirds buzzing around her setup? Look between the fence just to the right of the flower for one, and the second is to the immediate left.

How to Get to the Bull River Guest Ranch

From Cranbrook, British Columbia

Fly into the Cranbrook airport. Then rent a car and drive about 30 miles to the ranch.

From Kalispell, Montana

Fly into the airport in Kalispell. Rent a car and drive about 130 miles to the guest ranch.

Pre-departure Information

Once your reservation form and deposit are received, we'll send information that covers everything you need to know, such as clothing suggestions, camera gear, and detailed directions to the Bull River Guest Ranch. Keep in mind you do need a Passport to enter Canada and return to the US.

Enroll Now

Each workshop is limited to 12 participants. We keep the size of the group small to allow everyone plenty of time at each photo station to shoot thousands of spectacular photos. A deposit of \$800 is required to reserve your space.

Please contact John or Dixie to make sure space is available first!

How to reach John Gerlach and Dixie Calderone

We are on the road most of the year. You can reach us most quickly by email.

John and Dixie's contact info:

johngerlachphotography@gmail.com or (Tel) 208-320-0951

Dixie Calderone (Tel) 812-350-0799

Please send payment by check to:

John Gerlach/2632 N. Marr Road/Columbus, IN 47203. Make check payable to John Gerlach Photography.

Cancellation Policy

There is a \$200 cancellation fee. The remaining unpaid balance is due **March 1, 2020**. The \$800 deposit becomes non-refundable 90 days before the start of the workshop. All fees are non-refundable if you cancel the workshop thirty days or less before the start of the workshop since the ranch has a no-refund policy at 30 days. Naturally, if I can refill your spot, then refunds will be made, but don't count on me being able to refill your spot close to the time the workshop begins. Trip cancellation insurance is strongly advised.

View the hummingbird photos!

If you are a member of Flickr, we have a site set up for folks to post images shot at these workshops. Visit:

<https://www.flickr.com/groups/bullriverhummers/>

And John's personal image sharing site is next!

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/142501139@N02/>



Figure 13 The male calliope hummingbird hovers above a hum-button. Bright overcast light brings out the color.



Figure 14 Two female rufous hummingbirds share the same feeder that is barely hidden behind the flowers. For this image a zoom lens is handy! I am set up at 400mm for one bird at the feeder and zoomed to a slightly shorter focal length to accommodate two birds!



Figure 15 The male black-chinned hummingbird has some color on the throat.



Figure 16 This male calliope hummingbird delighted my groups in 2019. I will regularly check the small group of rose bushes he "owned" in 2020 to see if he returned so you can photograph him too. All images are made with natural light and a 600mm lens, 1.4x teleconverter, 25mm extension tube, and AF microadjusted to +5. As always, I teach the skills necessary to shoot superb images with flash or natural light!

The bull River Guest Ranch lies in a secluded valley surrounded by nearby mountains. Though I know the way, just for fun I turned on the GPS in my truck and it showed me wandering straight up untracked mountains. An interesting idea perhaps, but I knew I was on a decent dirt road, so don't go by GPS!

DIRECTIONS FROM CRANBROOK TO BULL RIVER GUEST RANCH

1. DRIVE NORTHEAST ON CROWSNEST HWY/VAN HORNE ST N/BC-3 E/BC-95 N TOWARD 1 ST. N. Continue to follow Crowsnest Hwy/BC-3/BC-95 N approx. 9 km
2. Merge onto Kootenay Hwy/BC-93 N/BC-95 S via the ramp to Invermere – Radium
3. Turn right onto Kootenay Hwy/BC-93 N/BC-95 N (follow signs to Invermere/Radium/Golden) approx. 7 km
4. Turn right at the Fort Steele Esso station onto the Fort Steele/Wardner Road and drive for about 22km.
5. Turn left onto the Bull River Road and drive approx. 15 km to the Bull River Guest Ranch on the left. You will see a nice wooden sign for the ranch.
6. Rejoice! You have entered this magical hummingbird haven.

<http://www.bullriverguestranch.com>



Figure 17 The protective male rufous awaits you. We call him the "red baron" and you will likely find out why!