

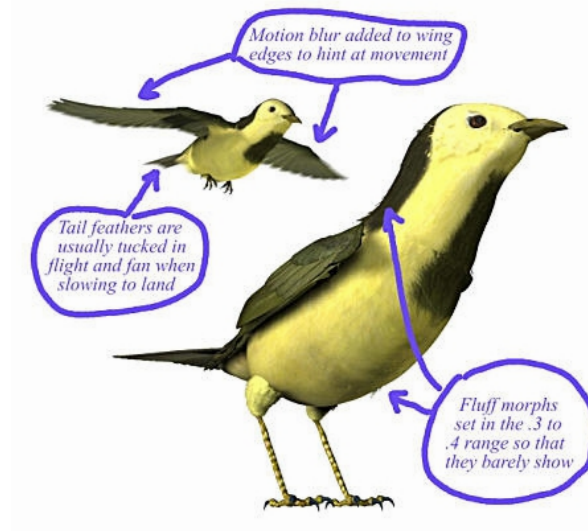
Digital Bird Tricks and Tips

by Ken Gilliland c2004

Posing

In using bird models, the easiest way to add realism is with the proper pose. I received many comments about how natural my bird images appear and the secret is with the pose. There are good reference materials available such as birding magazines and books, I've found the best way to figure out good poses is to simply sit out in your yard or nearby park and observe. Having binoculars and a nearby bird feeder is better. Notice the key movements and stances. How they land, how they interact with each other, perching and foraging habits. I could think of worse ways to spend an hour or so.

Now back in Poser, start with one of the preset poses available Songbird packages or in The Songbird ReMix Central free Section. They are a good starting place and I stress, starting place. Make the pose your own, add what you saw during your observations and you'll find your bird image has life. In using the Songbird ReMix model, I will often use the neck "Unfluff" morph and sometimes the Hip "Unfluff" morph usually set at 0.3 to 0.4 on the dial. This brings out some "Fluff" feathers that will help to lose some of the hard edges of the model.



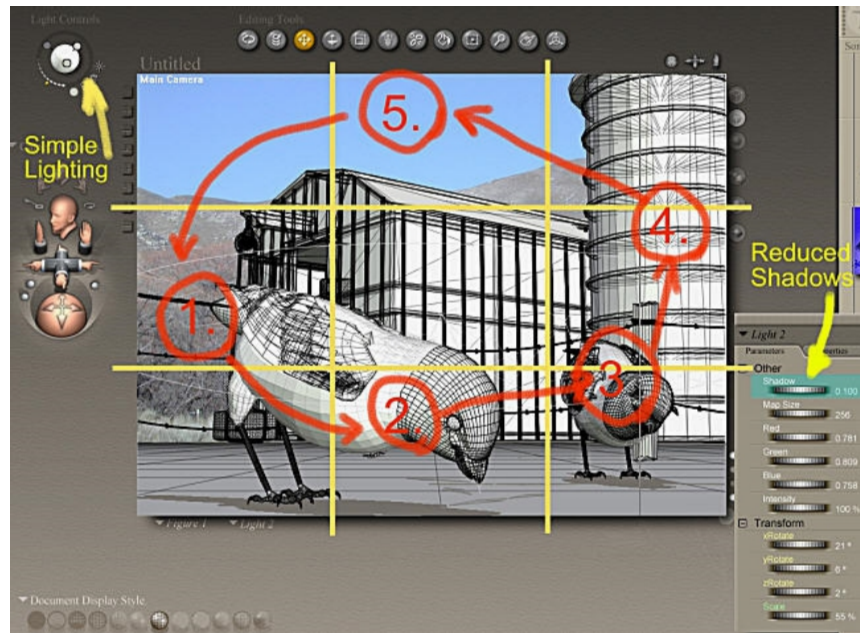
When viewing a photograph of a bird, or watching a bird in flight, you'll notice wings are rarely sharp and crisp. Poser Pro and Poser 5 both have motion blur capabilities. When I create birds in flight for a rendered image, I will add some flight animation (5 frames or so) to the birds—mostly wing flaps, some tail and body movement and render with motion blur. If the motion blur doesn't render to my satisfaction then I'll add it in post with my 2D paint program.

Lighting

For ground feeding or birds on limbs, I prefer simple lighting. Often I'll use the default three lights Poser offers though changing the light colors to light gray tones. I also turn down or off two of the three light's shadows, allowing my "sun" or main light to provide the shadows. The "working" image of my "Texas Henslow's Sparrow" shows the positioning of a simple 3 light scene. For birds in flight, I'll often add a medium gray "bounce" light with no shadows to light the underside of the bird.

Composition

Composition makes the image memorable and I could probably fill the entire magazine with my thoughts on image creation and composition theory. I'll condense those all thoughts to a few easy to follow tricks. First of all, the majority of people read from left to right—probably not too surprising, they view art the same way. So when creating your image, keep that in mind, your imagery should help the viewer do what's natural. For example, in my "Texas Henslow's Sparrow" image, notice how the fence angles slightly to the right side (1) and



lines up the foreground (2) and background (3) Sparrows. It then brings you to the Silo, which fills the right side. The filling of the negative space with the Silo (4) stops your eye from falling off the right edge and brings it's skyward. The solid sky block (5) brings your eye back to the left, where it drops to the fence (1) and the cycle is repeated, making a loop. This image also uses "Golden" or "Magic Thirds". The positioning of objects on the thirds marks on the image or filling them entirely makes a stronger composition. The foreground Sparrow is almost targeted by the lower horizontal third and first vertical third lines and the background sparrow is just outside the second vertical third line but is solidified by the silo filling the right third almost entirely. The sparrow's head falls just below the lower horizontal third, underscoring that the sparrow is making eye contact with the viewer. This is another trick I use, "Point of View". Since the star of my image is a bird, I want make sure that we're eye-to-eye with the star—it subconsciously builds a relationship between the main character of the image and the viewer. Those are just a few of the composition tricks I regularly use. A strong and solid composition is what makes an image not just good or great, but memorable.