



## DIPPERS

Dippers are birds of extremes; they live their lives on fast flowing rivers and often raise their broods within inches of raging waterfalls. Damian Waters goes in search of this fascinating character.



### Field Signs

Dippers prefer fast flowing water. Pick a likely spot close to home where you know there are suitable rivers and do a bit of research - large scale maps can be a good source of information but there is no substitute for getting out on foot and exploring your local patch. The tell tale sign for the presence of Dippers is mid-stream rocks marked with white droppings. See this and you can start to believe Dippers might be close by. Find a vantage point that allows a good view of a long stretch of river and scan up and down with binoculars. Remember that Dippers get their name from their constant bobbing and ability to dive under water, so they are not the easiest bird to spot in the field!



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### Staying out of sight

Rivers usually provide lots of places to keep out of sight - tangles of roots or areas of cutaway riverbank are ideal. It is essential to make yourself as hard to see as possible. Bag hides or scrim netting can be used to break up your outline and disguise your gear. Another useful accessory is an all weather cover to cope with any surprise downpour or spray from the stream.

### Eye to Eye

For shots with high impact keep your camera position at the same level as the water or perching rock. Bean bags or a monopod will help keep the camera stable as tripods are not always practical to set up on the bankside. Think about the composition of your images, including moss covered rocks or water in the frame help set the scene. The contrast of the Dipper's white 'bib' and dark body can be challenging, make sure you expose for the lightest part of the bird to avoid blown out highlights. Dippers also frequent dark places (the underside of a bridge is a favourite nest location) so think about the lighting available.



### Additional resources

**RSPB Facts** - [www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/birdguide/name/d/dipper/index.asp](http://www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/birdguide/name/d/dipper/index.asp)  
**Bird Guides** - [www.birdguides.com/html/vidlib/species/Cinclus\\_cinclus.htm](http://www.birdguides.com/html/vidlib/species/Cinclus_cinclus.htm)  
**Damian Waters** - see more excellent images from Damian at his website: [www.drumimages.co.uk](http://www.drumimages.co.uk)

### TECH TALK

- Choose a lens around 400mm or 500mm or 100-400mm zoom
- Keep shutter speeds around 1/250sec to freeze the action - boost the ISO to 400 - 640 if necessary to get this speed
- Keep aperture wide open around f4 or f5.6
- Watch out for blown highlights on the the dipper's white chest



### FIELD TIPS

- A good Dipper location is seldom an isolated location! Always respect the right of others to enjoy the countryside and make sure you have permission to be on the land.
- Don't forget to take insect repellent - rivers can come with a whole variety of biting insects in the summer months!

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