# Photoshop Layers: A primer, Part 2 – David Jenkins

As Adobe moves Photoshop from a stand-alone item to a program that is going to be internet-based, some of the techniques that we've used since the dawn of Photoshop are going to find themselves online. Now, this is not a place to discuss the relative pros and cons of working from such a program; however, it's worth noting that the majority of the real "photographic" uses are finding their way into the likes of Lightroom (LR) and Aperture (AP3). This means that some of the 'round tripping' of the past, with an image making a trip out of and back into Photoshop are going to go the way of wooden wagon wheels.

Much of what I've tutored in the past sessions is now so much easier within the LR or AP3 application. As a photographer, I wonder how Photoshop in the cloud is going to work for us. It's early days yet. Time will tell.

Last time we looked at some of the very basic functions within the Layers Palette, and now we'll continue. I must also point out that some of the features in the Palette have changed or been reassigned in the latest versions of Photoshop, so it's hard to be all things to all users. So let's get started:

1. One of the great steps forward for Photoshop layers came back in about Photoshop 6. It became possible to **put layers into a folder in the Layer Palette**. So all the text layers could be grouped together, or all the lighten/darken layers could be together, and the colour correction layers could be separated from all the rest.

It's easy to do. Click on the **Folder Icon** at the bottom of the Layer palette. The New Layer Set Folder's Group Properties dialogue box will appear. Give the layer set folder a name, and then simply drag the layers you want to group together onto the Folder icon to add them in.
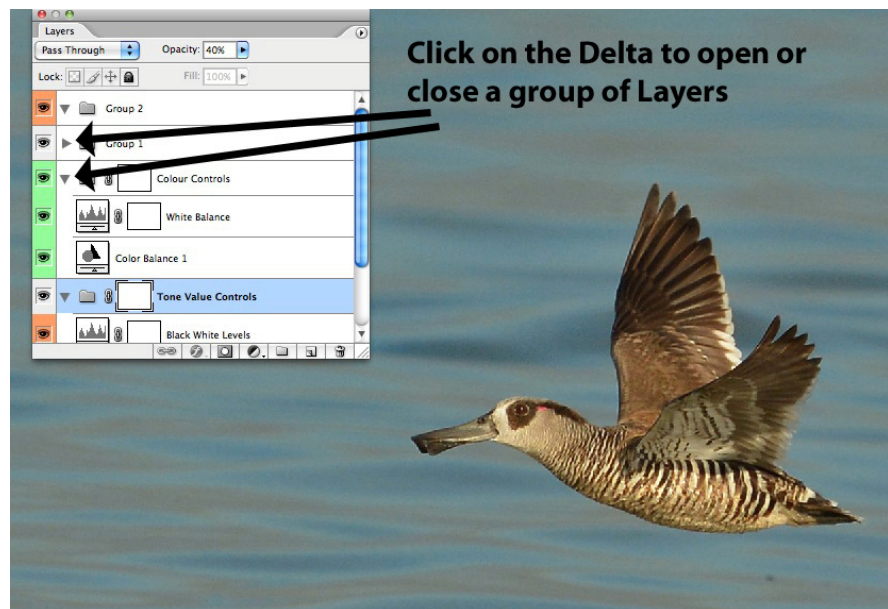

Layer Set Tool

Set Colour for Layer Folder
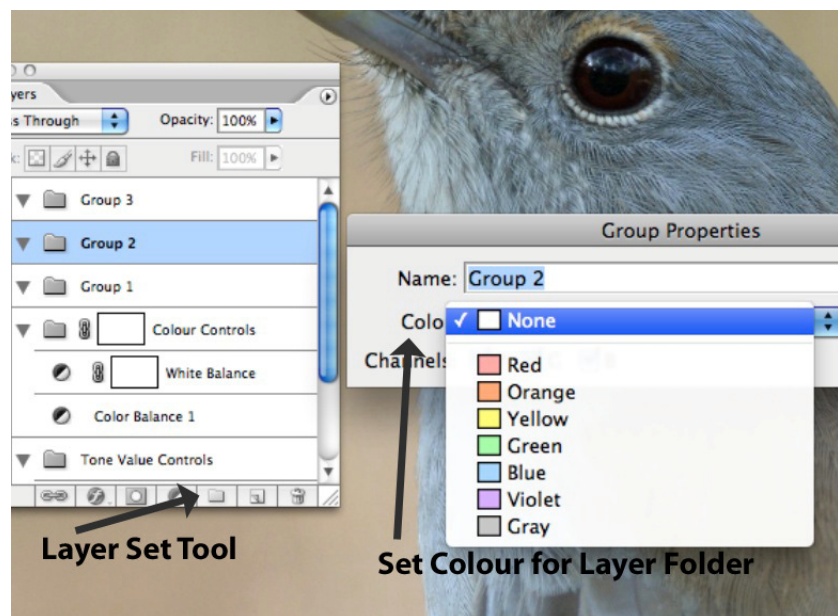
2. You can colour code both **layers** and **layer folders**. In the New Layer Set Folder box, check the colour you'd like to use.

3. To add a colour to a Layer, either **double-click on the layer**, or **Alt/Option double-click on the Layer Name** to get to the Layer Properties box.

**Group Colour applies to all the layers in that group**
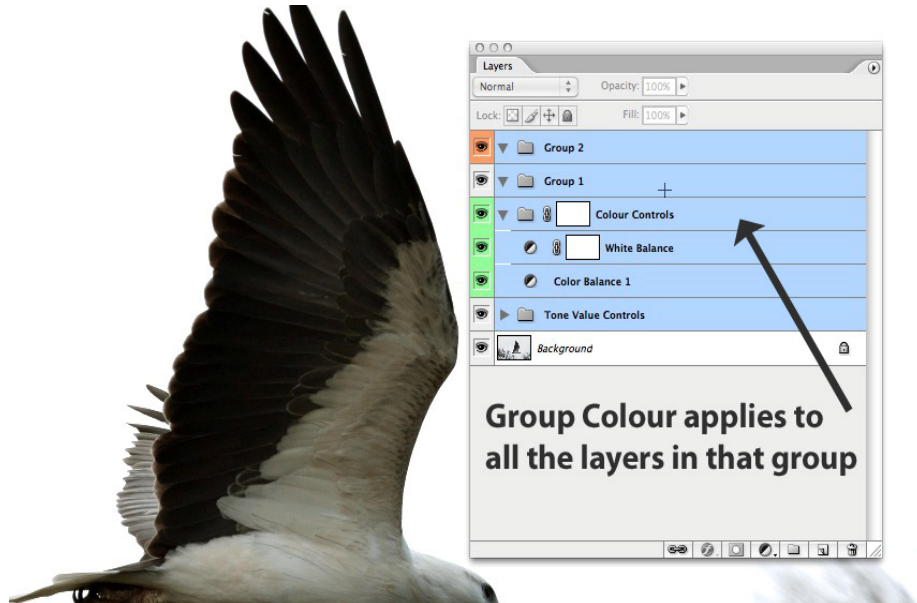
4. Layer Sets can be closed to conserve space. To close, click on the little downward pointing **Delta** (the little downward pointing arrow) next to the Layer Set name. To expand it, click on the Delta again.

**Click on the Delta to open or close a group of Layers**

5. One really cool thing about a set is it has an **opacity slider** available. Moving this will cause the effects of all the layers inside the Set to be reduced by the amount set. Personally I've never seen the need to do this, as I like to have individual control over each layers effect. But, isn't it cool you can do it?
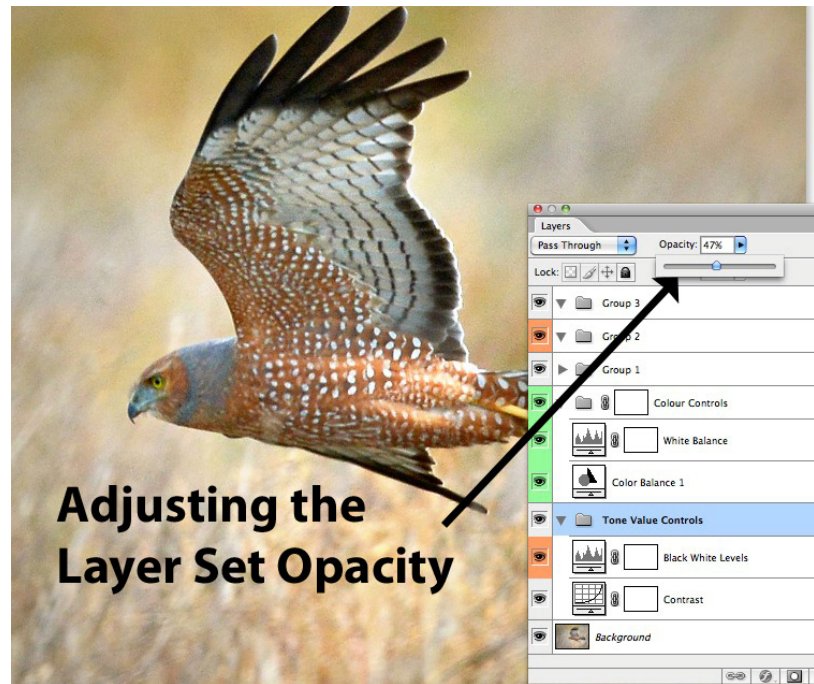

At the bottom of the Layers palette are a set of icons, some of which we've already worked with, but here they are in detail. From right to left:

6. The first is a little "*f*" It is the pop-up menu for the **Layer Effects**. It really is for the graphic arts folk, as adding a bevelled edge (for example) to a photo of a Brown-headed Honeyeater doesn't seem all that useful!
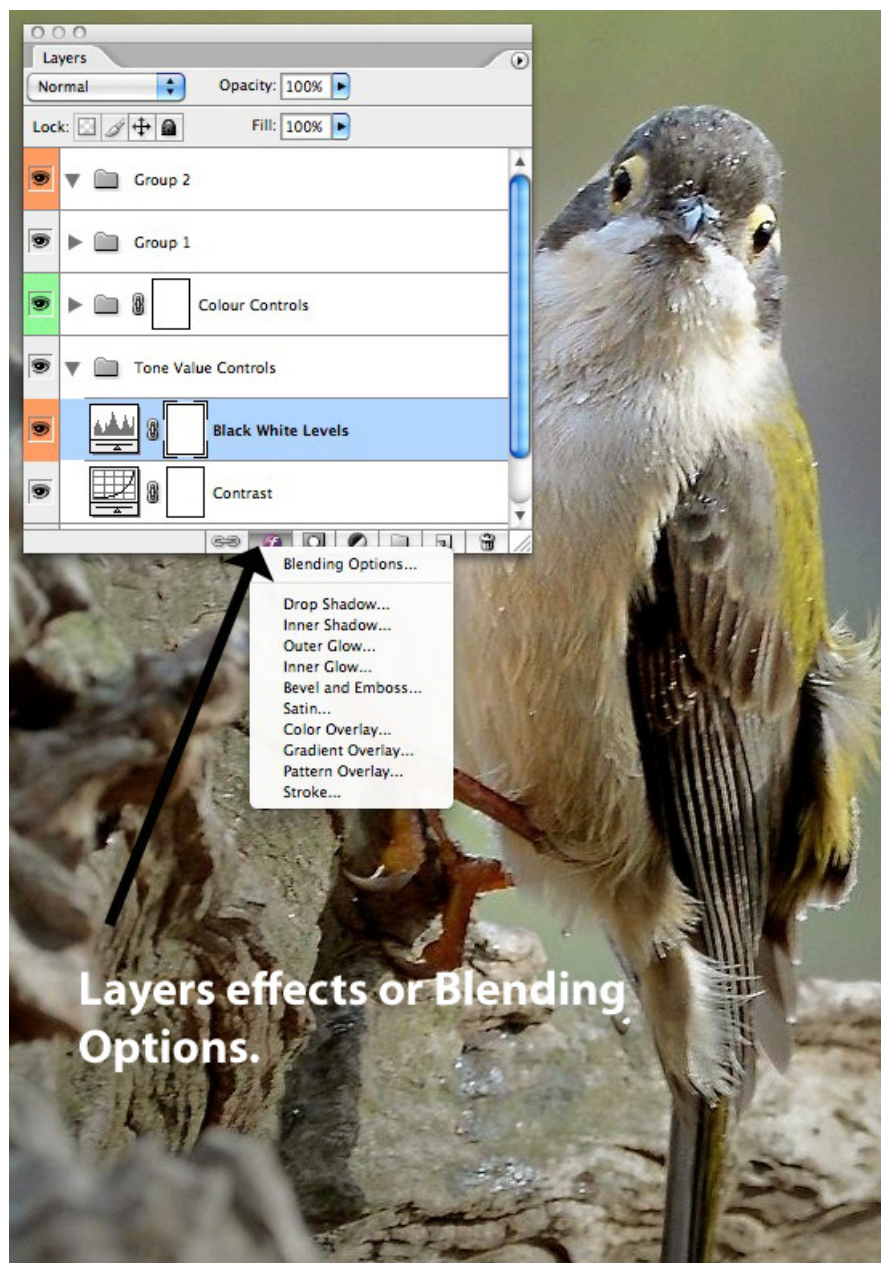
7. The next is the **Layer Mask** icon. In a nutshell, this makes certain pixels in the layer transparent. Again, it's mostly a graphic arts tool. **BUT** Put a photo on each of two layers, then assign a mask to the top layer, and you can let through parts of the underlying image. It's a bit like erasing the top layer, but it's not destructive, as it does not remove pixel data; it simply allows through the lower layer values. Think *"putting someone's head inside a daffodil"*.

8. The next one is the black/white circle – often called the yin and yang symbol. This gives direct access to the **Content Layers**. Here is where the fill, colour fill, tonal corrections and other really useful items can be found. In previous tutorials we've looked at a number of these, and rather than plod through them here, I'll leave that for Part 3.
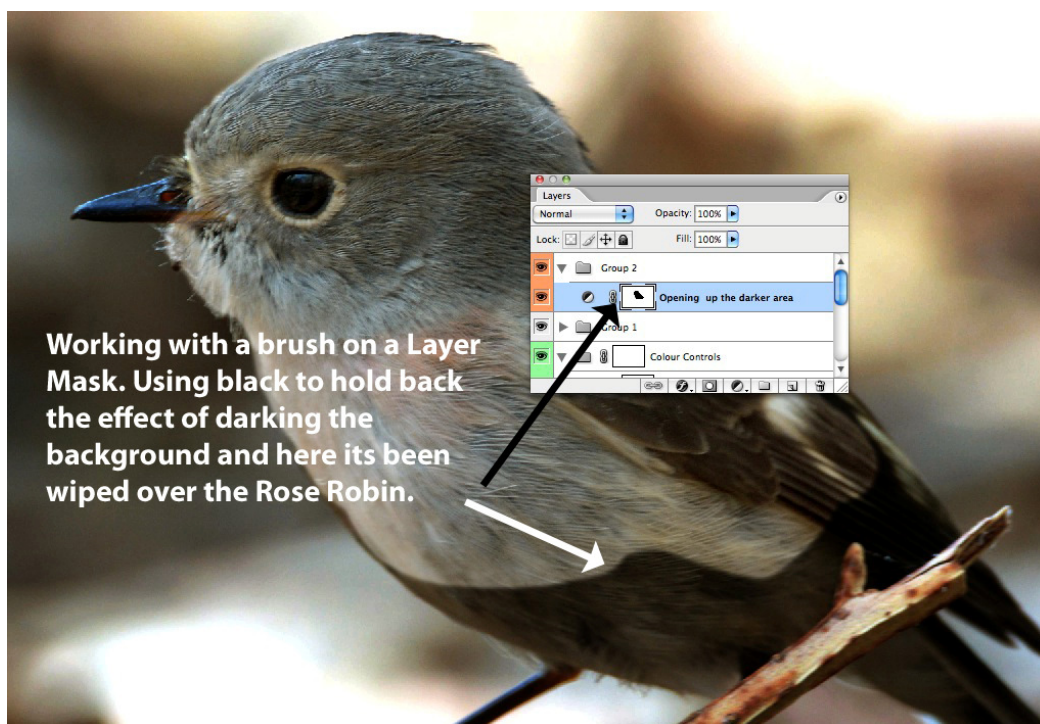

Setting a layer mode
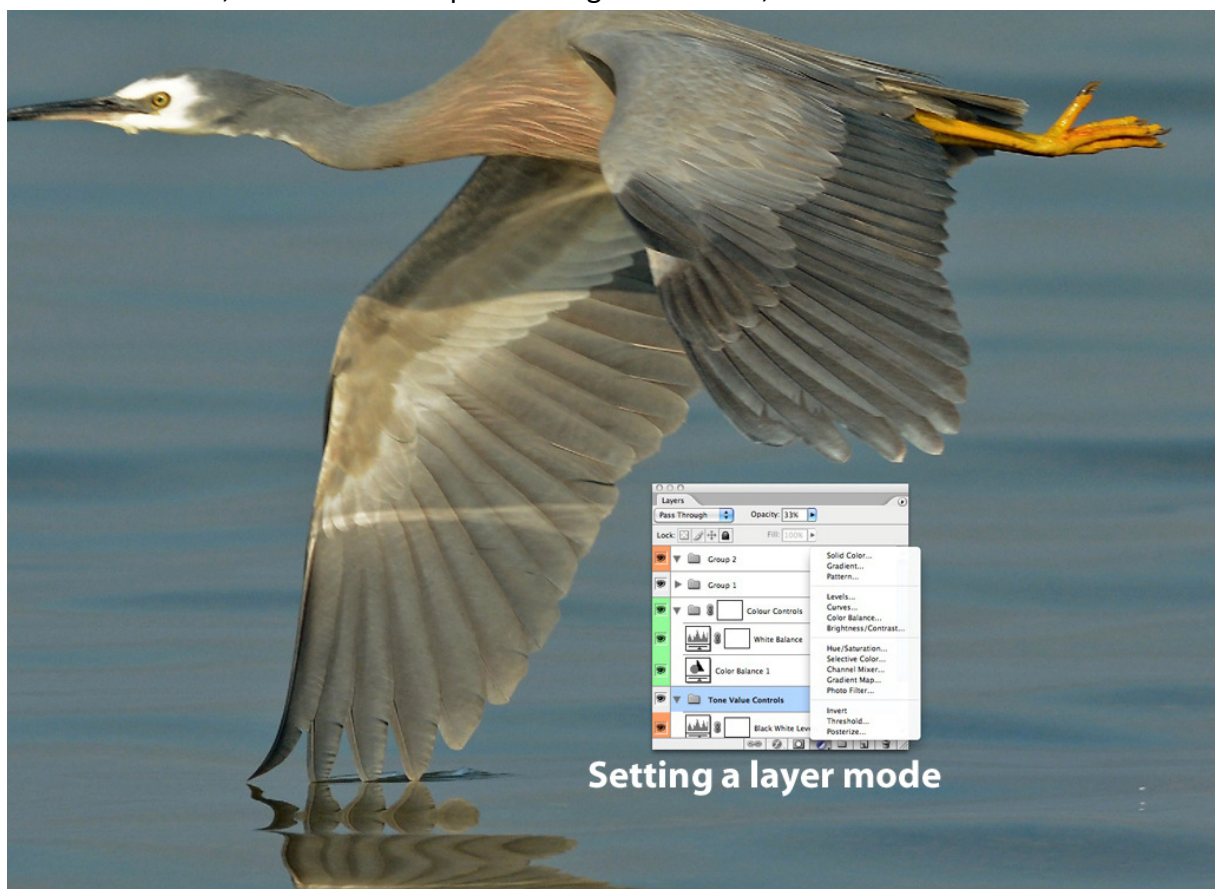
The huge advantage of Content Layers is they are a permanent part of the image set, and when you save an image you save that content layer. Then, in say, a couple of months, you can open the image up again and make changes to the Layer, without affecting any other work you've done. Unlike in **History**, which is lost when the image is closed.


Using Layer mode to make a Contrast enhancement
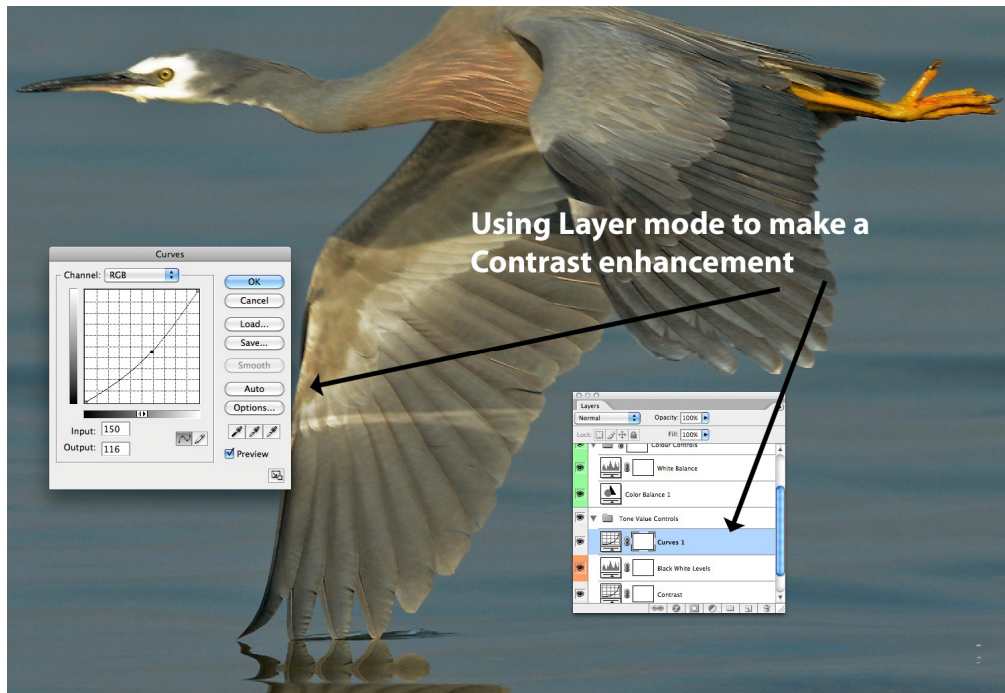
The other big advantage of Content Layers is the control you can have by painting onto the layer to allow the effect (paint White) or hold back the effect (paint Black); or you can paint grey values to allow a little or a lot of the effect. If you've followed any of the previous tutes, you'll know this to be one of my favourite ways of working.

Working with a brush on a Layer Mask. Using black to hold back the effect of darking the background and here its been wiped over the Rose Robin.

9. The next icon (at the bottom of the Layers palette) is the **Layers Sets** icon. See points 1,2, & 3 (earlier) for details.

10. The next icon is the **New Layer** icon. Pretty simple! Click on it to create a new Layer that you want to work on.

Create a New Layer
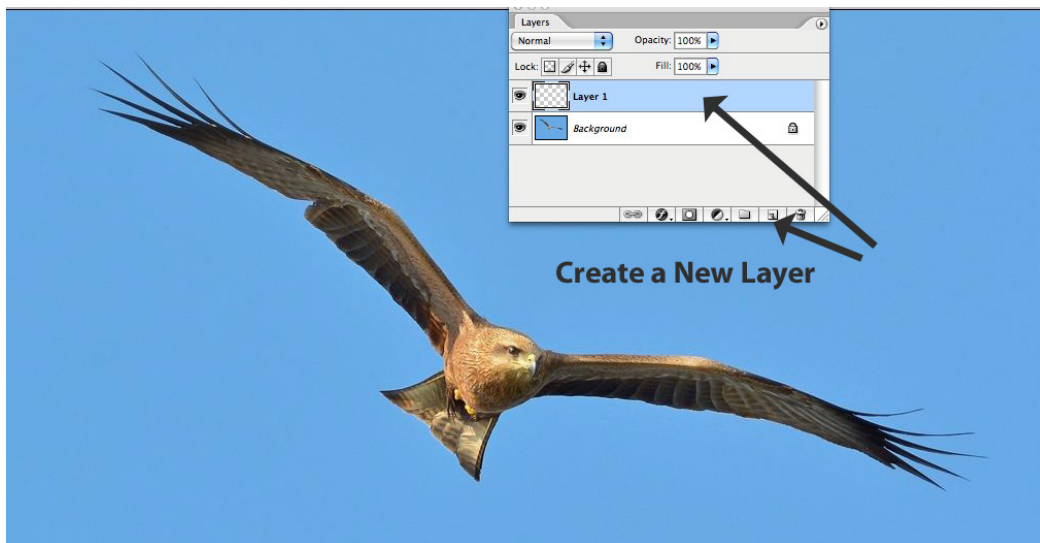
11. The **Trash Can** icon is an obvious one, and it's where Layers that are no longer needed should be sent. Either highlight a Layer and press Delete, or - much more fun - click on the layer, hold and drag to the Trash Can. If you decide you didn't mean to do that, then Control/Command-Z will bring it back. Otherwise, it's gone!

Trash Bin Icon

By now layers should no longer hold the 'mystery' that seems to be built up around them. And next time we'll have a good look at Content Layer and Modes to see how they are some of the best photo enhancing tools Photoshop has to offer. For those in Lightroom or AP3, the good news they are now pretty much all built right into the Develop or Adjustments modules.

Now, away from the computer, find some birds and commit photography. We do.