



©Darwin Wiggett - Sigma 50-500mm at 500mm, 1/25s at f10



©Darwin Wiggett - Sigma 50-500 at 450mm, 1/640s at f7.1

The Dislikes:

No lens is perfect and the 50-500mm lens has some flaws that may make or break it for you:

- 95mm front lens element means the lens is hard to filter. I managed to use a polarizer and ND filters by using a Cokin Z-Pro Holder and a Cokin Z-Pro 95mm adapter ring but using filters on this lens will cost you big bucks to buy Z-Pro or Lee sized filters. This is not an easy lens to filter.
- if you use 1.4, 1.7 or 2x extenders you will not be able to auto-focus your lens (manual focus only). I would not recommend extenders for this lens as sharpness suffers to non-acceptable levels. Plus who needs an extender when you got this much zoom range?
- the lens is less contrasty than Canon or Nikon lenses and sometimes the colours seem a bit flat (but for me that was an easy fix in JPEG camera settings or in RAW conversions).
- when I use live view and manual focus I love it when the lens stays sharply focused no matter what focal length I zoom to (like my Sigma 120-400mm lens does) – the 50-500mm lens needs to be refocused every time you change the zoom setting (frustrating for the way I shoot). But when auto-focus is used, the lens is zippy and so refocusing is less of a chore.
- the weight and bulk turns some people off but it is only a tad bigger than the Canon 100-400mm lens

and for what you get I think the lens is actually surprisingly small.

- like all big lenses, to get optical sharpness requires precision in technique – this lens requires a super robust and sturdy tripod for any shots less than 1/60th or 1/125th of a second. People might complain that this lens is not sharp but chances are good it's an inadequate tripod problem and not a problem with the lens! For longer shutter speeds, 1/30th of a second or longer, mirror lock-up and a remote release are a must! It is difficult to get a sharp shot with this lens at slow shutter speeds unless you are using proper technique and have a super solid tripod and tripod head.
- this lens (and many super long lenses) doesn't do great with distant subjects; atmospheric haze, heat shimmers and other atmospheric effects can reduce apparent sharpness in long lenses and long zoom settings; realize this is not a issue with this lens but is a a long telephoto issue in general.
- the lens vignettes (slight darkening of corners) at all focal lengths in apertures from f4.5 to about f9.0. I don't mind this because I often purposefully add vignetting to my photos in post because I like the effect (the vignetting can easily be fixed in Camera RAW). But some people demand and need even exposures across the frame.
- the lens does suffer from fringing at the edges of the frame with full-frame cameras when the lens is in the 50-150mm range and shot in contrasty light (this can easily be corrected in Camera RAW in Photoshop or Lightroom). If you plan to shoot JPEGS and do not want to spend time correcting fringing, then this lens might be problematic for you.
- edge sharpness on full frame cameras is about one quality factor from center sharpness (but this is common with most lenses). On APS-sized sensors both edge vignetting and edge sharpness concerns disappear because of the crop factor of the camera.



©Darwin Wiggett - Sigma 50-500mm at 450mm with a Cokin P173 Blue-Yellow polarizer, 1/4s at f16

Below is an image shot at 50mm with the Sigma 50-500mm lens and the image that follows shows the fringing at the edge of the frame in contrasty light.



©Darwin Wiggett - Sigma 50-500mm lens at 50mm, 1/1600s
at f10



Colour fringing at the edges of the frame at 50mm with the Sigma 50-500mm lens

Conclusion

I was super skeptical about this lens. Any lens with a 10X zoom range I am ready to write off as crappy in terms of image quality. I told Sigma I would test it but that they should be prepared for a completely honest review. I was prepared to pan this lens. But I was wrong.

Sure the lens is not as sharp as a 300 or 500mm prime lens, but who would expect it to be? I was surprised by how good this lens actually was especially in the 200-400mm range. It was decent at 500mm and yields publication quality images (with a little help from post-production sharpening). The weak spot in the lens is the 50-150mm range where sharpness and fringing are problems that need to be fixed in post-processing. Also this lens needs to be used with proper techniques to yield optimal results.



©Darwin Wiggett - Sigma 50-500 at 244mm, 1/30s at f13

The one thing that caught me off guard is how much I loved the zoom range and how I felt I was ready to capture any subject from intimate details, to landscapes both grand and extractive, to wildlife all with one lens. I got addicted to having one do it all (and more) lens on my camera. How liberating! And surprisingly I found that long lens settings in the 400-500mm range made up the vast majority of my landscape work with this lens.

If I was going on a trip that was a combination of generic nature photography where I might expect grand landscapes, wildlife and intimate details, then I would be tempted to take just two lenses; a 24-70mm f2.8 and the 50-500mm lens. Two lens and I am covered for every possibility! In fact next year I am going to Iceland and these two lenses might be my perfect travel companions.



©Darwin Wiggett - Sigma 50-500mm lens at 167mm, 1/60s at f5.6

The Dilemma

Sigma lenses are made to fit Canon, Nikon, Pentax, Sony, and Sigma cameras so if you have one of these camera systems, then you might consider the Sigma 50-500mm lens. The problem is Sigma makes a few long range telephotos to choose from and so your choices become a bit difficult:

Sigma 50-500 f4.5-6.3 – reviewed above (\$1800 CAN)

Sigma 150-500mm lens f5-6.3 – (street price \$1200 CAN)

Sigma 120-400mm lens f4.5-5.6 – see my review here (street price \$1000 CAN)

Which one to buy?? It all depends on what you own already, your needs, your photographic subjects etc. I bought the 120-400mm lens after I reviewed it because I liked it better than Canon's 100-400mm lens and I liked that I could filter the lens easily (77mm filters which I already own). Plus I already have a 70-200mm

lens. That choice made sense for me. Look at the specs of each of these lenses and check out several reviews to decide if any of these lenses shoot your shooting style and budget.

For an all round nature shooting I would be happy with either the 50-500 or the 120-400mm lenses. I have not used the 150-500mm lens. If I planned to be a wildlife specialist, I would save up my coin for a fast prime lens (300mm f2.8, 500mm f4 or a 200-400mm f4 or Sigma's new 120-300 f2.8) but all of these these lenses are very expensive and very heavy. There is no perfect lens but with a little research you can find one that is a good match for you. Good luck!

Full disclosure: I am sponsored by [Sigma Canada](#). I give fully honest reviews of what I think but for some people the issue of 'sponsorship' might colour their view of this review. I only accept sponsorship from companies where I am allowed to say whatever I think, Sigma Canada allows this.



©Darwin Wiggett - Sigma 50-500 at 167mm, 1/4s at f13



©Darwin Wiggett - Sigma 50-500 at 167mm, 1/10s at f10



©Darwin Wiggett - Sigma 50-500mm lens at 500mm, 1/250s at f6.3