Photoshop Tutorial
Using Masks on Layer Modes: Lightening the eyes – David Jenkins

"The eye is the window to the soul", so they say. As bird photographers it's great to be able to get a little light into the eye to give the portrait that extra lift. For years, studio photographers of old would add a little catch-light to the person just to give their portrait that feeling of life.

We've looked, over the past tutorials, at the techniques and the technicalities behind working with layers. Here is a little practical application that can be bought into play with Photoshop or PS Elements, and also from within Lightroom or Aperture.

An **Adjustment Layer** can have a **Mask** attached to it. If the mask is filled with white pixels then the adjustment made is allowed through, and the entire image is affected. If we change the fill on the mask to black, then the adjustment is completely held back and no effect is seen on the image. We can then paint with white on the mask and allow the adjustment to show through in just a small part of to change only the area we would like to change.

I use this a lot to add a little extra lightening to the eye of the bird. In brief: I apply the effect, add a "black" mask, then paint the area where I want the effect with a "white" brush. I use this because of the control, and because it's easier to paint than to try making selections; it also allows some fine-tune 'tweaking' of the change.

So here goes …

1. Open an image. For this example I'll use an Eastern Yellow Robin portrait.

2. Make your usual settings for White/Black points, Contrast and Colour Balance layers.

3. Create a new layer from the **Create New Adjustment Layer** icon in the Layer Palette. The Adjustment I'll use here is the Brightness/Contrast one.
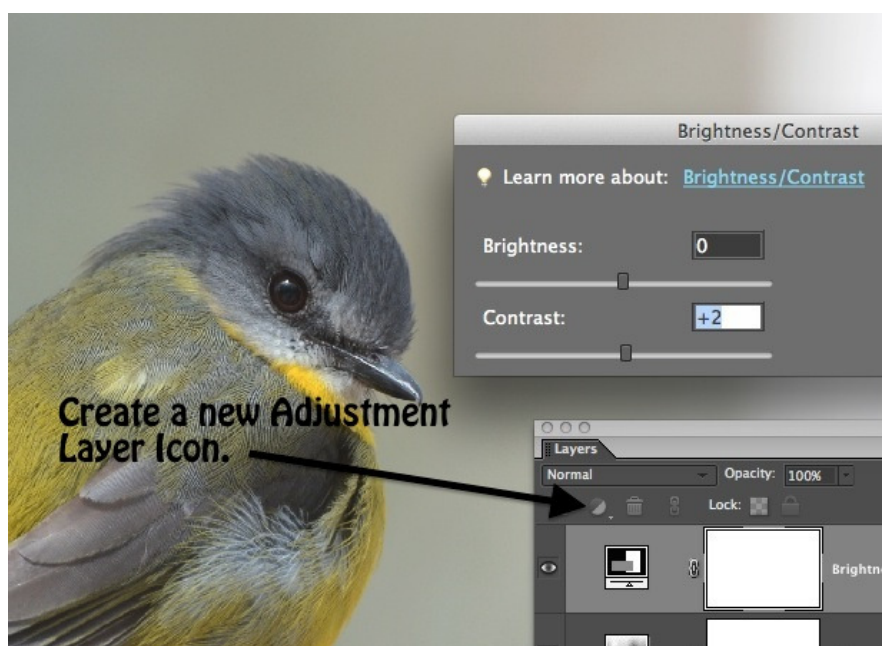
4. Most times we would avoid Brightness and Contrast as they are generally much too aggressive. But for this it works fine.

5. Lighten the image and adjust the contrast until the eye of the bird looks about right. The rest of the picture will be far too light. Click OK to create the Adjustment Layer.
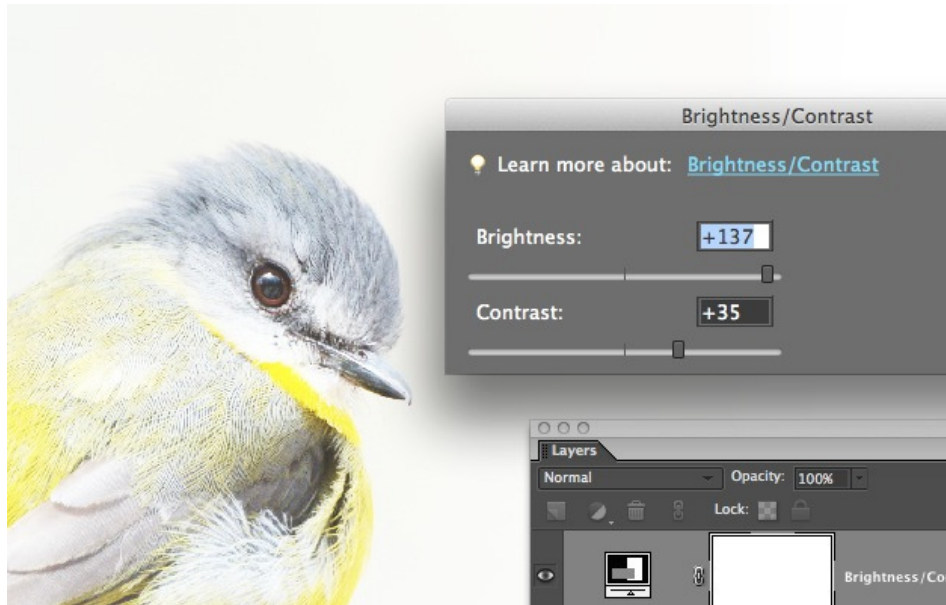

6. Ensure that in the Toolbar the "**Set Foreground Color**" is set to **Black** (any other colour won't work). Tap the "**D**" key for default colours and then the "**X**" key to eXchange the foreground/background colours, thus setting the foreground to black.

7. Hold down the **Alt** key and press the **Delete** key, the Mask will fill with black. It seems strange to use the Delete key, but that's the way the keyboard shortcut has been setup. Use the Delete key on the keyboard, not the one on the numeric pad.
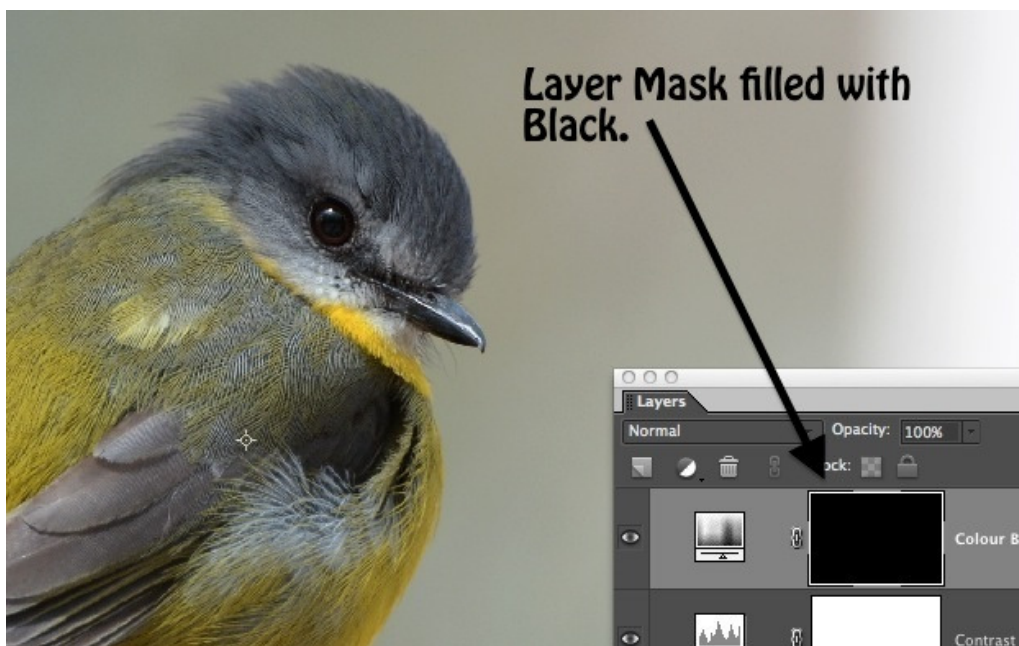
8. The image will now return to its original state. The black fill in the layer mask holds back the changes.

9. With the Layer still active, choose the **Brush Tool** (keyboard "**B**").

10. Exchange the foreground colour to White ("**X**" on keyboard).

11. Make the Brush size about the size of the bird's eye. I usually make it just a little less. The "**[**" and "**]**" keys will quickly change the size.

12. Paint over the eye until the effect shows through. You'll be able to see in the Mask a white area showing where you've painted. Just like a stencil.
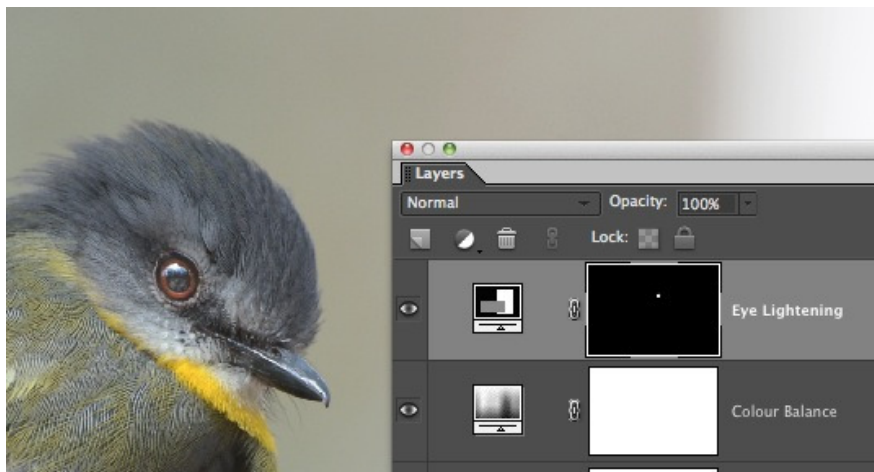
13. To finalise the change, I usually then go to the **Layer Opacity** and reduce it a little to get a nice balance.
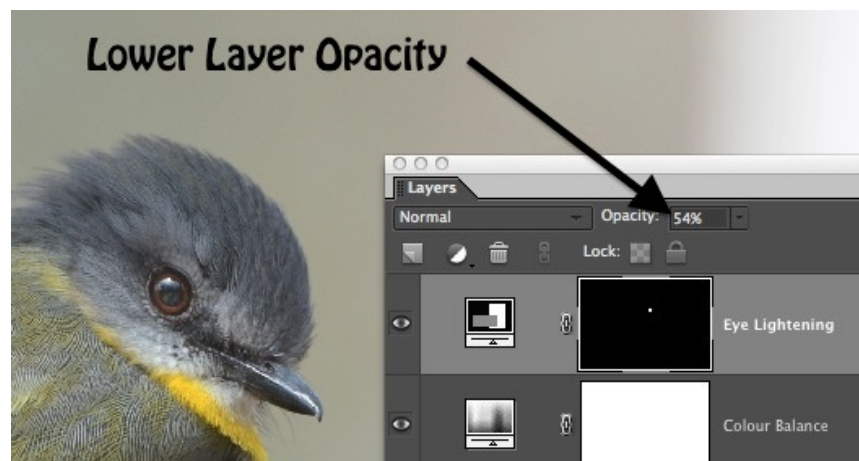
14. I've shown it as 54% here, but I wanted to be sure it would show in the newsletter, normally I'd only just want it to be a subtle change.

15. Use the same technique to lighten or darken other areas of the image. *Why not use the Dodge and Burn brushes from the Tool bar? Control over the change.* If I need just a little more or less then I only have to make a change to the Layer Opacity.

16. If you go too far with the white brush, simply change it back to a black brush and paint out the "whoopsie". "**X**" on the keyboard.

Here's a side-by-side comparison, with the Eastern Yellow Robin:

And here's a second image comparison: