



I want to clear out my iPhone (and Apple Photos) so that I only retain the images I really want to keep on my phone. I use Lightroom Classic, and wonder whether an import of ALL photos from Apple Photos, deletion from the cloud, then selection and editing where appropriate, and re-export back to Apple as JPEGs might be a workable solution. I would like to keep the EXIF data, and to store the re-exported images in Date order. Is this a sensible strategy; could you detail a workflow that would work.

Your strategy is essentially sound, and with the right steps it works well. The key nuance is managing the file creation date vs. EXIF capture date issue when re-importing back into Apple Photos. Here's a complete workflow:

Is the Strategy Sensible?

Yes, fundamentally. Importing everything from Apple Photos into Lightroom Classic, culling and editing, then re-exporting selected JPEGs back to Apple Photos is a well-established approach. The main pitfall is that when Lightroom Classic exports a JPEG, the file creation date is set to the export date (not the original capture date), which can confuse Apple Photos' date ordering. However, the EXIF `DateTimeOriginal` is preserved in the exported file, and Apple Photos *should* use this for its "Photos" timeline view. You may need a small extra step (see below) to ensure correct ordering in all views. ^[1] ^[2] ^[3]

Phase 1: Export Everything from Apple Photos

Before touching anything, make sure iCloud is set to **Download and Keep Originals** on your iPhone (Settings → [Your Name] → iCloud → Photos), otherwise you'll only get low-resolution proxies. ^[4]

On your Mac, in Apple Photos:

1. Select all photos (⌘A)
2. Go to File → Export → Export Unmodified Original

3. Check the "Export IPTC as XMP" checkbox — this preserves keyword metadata that LRC will otherwise ignore^[5]
4. Export to a working folder, e.g. ~/Pictures/ApplePhotos-Export/

Important: Use *Unmodified Original* (not "Export 1 Photo"), so you get the actual capture files (HEIC, JPEG, or RAW) rather than re-encoded copies.^[6]

Phase 2: Import into Lightroom Classic

1. In LRC, open the **Import dialog** and point it at your export folder
2. In File Handling, tick "Don't Import Suspected Duplicates" if you already have some of these images in your catalogue^[4]
3. Set the **Destination** to your standard date-based folder structure (e.g. YYYY/YYYY-MM-DD) using LRC's "Organize by Date" option
4. Apply a suitable **metadata preset** and any import develop preset if desired
5. Import all

Phase 3: Cull and Edit

This is your normal LRC workflow:

- Use flags (P for Pick, X for Reject) or star ratings to cull
- Edit selectively in the Develop module
- Run **Photo** → **Delete Rejected Photos** to purge rejects from the catalogue (and optionally from disk)

Phase 4: Clear Apple Photos / iCloud

Once you're confident your LRC catalogue is your master archive:

1. Back up the LRC catalogue first
2. In Apple Photos on Mac, select all and delete — this also removes from iCloud and your iPhone^[1]
3. Empty the "Recently Deleted" album in Photos to fully free the space

Phase 5: Export from LRC back to Apple Photos

When exporting selected, edited JPEGs for re-import into Apple Photos:

In the Export dialog, set:

- **Format:** JPEG, quality 80–90%

- **Metadata:** Include All Metadata (this preserves EXIF DateTimeOriginal, GPS, camera data) ^[3]
- **File Naming:** {YYYY}-{MM}-{DD}_{HH}{MM}{SS}_{original filename} — gives you human-readable date order in the filename itself
- **Destination folder:** A staging folder like ~/Pictures/ForApplePhotos/

The date-ordering fix: Apple Photos sorts its main "Photos" view by EXIF capture date, which *will* be correct. However, if you notice images out of order in any view, the free workaround is to use **Image → Adjust Date and Time** in Apple Photos after import to batch-correct any stragglers. For a more automated fix, the Mac utility **A-Better-Finder-Attributes** can set the file creation date to match the EXIF capture date before import. ^{[7] [8] [9]}

Re-importing into Apple Photos

1. In Apple Photos, **File → Import** and select your staging folder
2. At the review pane, choose **"Keep Folder Organisation"** if you organised exports into date-named subfolders — this creates albums mirroring your folder structure ^[10]
3. After import, verify the **"Photos"** view (not the "Imports" view) — this is where images appear sorted by capture date ^[9]

Key Points to Watch

| Issue | Cause | Fix |
|--|--|---|
| Images out of date order in Photos | File creation date ≠ EXIF date | Use A-Better-Finder-Attributes before import, or adjust in Photos after |
| Apple Photos metadata (keywords/albums) lost | Not included in Unmodified Original export | Use "Export IPTC as XMP" at export stage ^[5] |
| HEIC files from iPhone | LRC handles HEIC natively from macOS | No action needed; edit or export as JPEG |
| Duplicate risk | Some images already in LRC catalogue | Tick "Don't Import Suspected Duplicates" on import ^[4] |

This workflow gives you a clean, curated Apple Photos library on your iPhone, with LRC as the authoritative master archive — which aligns well with your existing Lightroom Classic workflow.

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Once re-organisation is achieved, is there a Plugin that could export LrC Collections to Apple Photos, again with Collection/Album details and EXIF/Meta data retained.

There is one dedicated plugin that does exactly what you need, plus a simpler built-in workaround. Here's the full picture:

LRPhotos Plugin (Best Option)

LRPhotos is a free, open-source Lightroom Classic **Publish Service** plugin specifically built to export photos from LrC Collections directly into Apple Photos, with album mapping and metadata retention. It's the closest thing to a "proper" solution for your use case. ^[30]

What it does

- Creates a **Publish Service** in LrC's Library module, so your Collections appear as Albums in Apple Photos ^[30]
- Maps LrC **Collection names** directly to **Apple Photos album names**, with optional folder hierarchy (e.g. /2024/Wales Wildlife creates a "Wales Wildlife" album inside a "2024" folder) ^[30]
- Preserves **EXIF metadata, location/GPS data, and person info** — these are explicitly kept on by default (unlike the standard LrC export which strips them unless you specify otherwise) ^[30]

- Tags each imported photo in Apple Photos with `lr:<catalog name>` and `album:<collection name>` ^[30]

- Handles **re-publishing** gracefully — if you update an image in LrC and re-publish, it updates the Apple Photos album and tags the old version `lr:out-of-date` ^[30]

Caveats to know

- Mac only (uses AppleScript under the hood — no Windows support) ^[30]
- The AppleScript interface for Photos.app has some restrictions: it **cannot delete photos** or add images to **shared albums**, so those actions remain manual ^[30]
- With large batches, Photos.app sometimes shows a modal confirmation dialog in the background, which can cause a timeout failure — keep the Photos window visible when publishing large collections ^[30]
- Latest release is **v2.1.2.0 (November 2024)**, so it is actively maintained ^[30]

Installation

1. Download the zip from github.com/sto3014/LRPhotos
2. Run `install.sh` in Terminal – copies the plugin, AppleScript libraries, and an Automator workflow into `~/Library` automatically
3. Restart LRC → the service appears in the Publish Services panel

Built-in LRC Workaround (No Plugin Needed)

If you prefer not to use a plugin, LRC's native **Post-Processing** export option gets you most of the way there: ^[31]

1. In the Export dialog, set **Post-Processing** → **After Export** → **Open in Application** → **Photos.app**
2. When the export finishes, Photos opens automatically and prompts you to choose (or create) a destination **album**
3. This works well for one-off exports, but you must manually specify the album each time — there's no automatic Collection→Album mapping

This approach still retains all EXIF and metadata as long as you have **"Include All Metadata"** ticked in the Metadata section of the Export dialog. ^[32]

Metadata Behaviour at a Glance

| Detail | LRPhotos Plugin | Native LRC Export to Photos |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| EXIF/GPS retained | ✓ Yes (on by default) | ✓ Yes (if "All Metadata" selected) |
| LRC Collection → Photos Album | ✓ Automatic | △ Manual per export |
| Re-publish / update tracking | ✓ Yes | ✗ No |
| Shared albums support | ✗ No (AppleScript limit) | ✗ No |
| Folder hierarchy in Photos | ✓ Yes (via / folder / album naming) | ✗ No |
| Cost | Free | Free (built-in) |

For your workflow — where Collections represent curated sets you'll want to mirror faithfully as Albums in Apple Photos — **LRPhotos is clearly the better route**. The one-time Terminal install is minimal, and given your comfort with PHP and WordPress plugin management, it will feel straightforward.

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