



# NATURE —MAGNIFICENT BEAUTY, JOYFUL MOMENTS— PHOTOGRAPHER

116 PAGES

16 ARTICLES

& MORE!

SPRING 2017—28TH YEAR

YES, YOU CAN  
ELUSIVE STORK  
INFINITE PATTERNS

# NATURE'S MAGNIFICENT BEAUTY

*"Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around."*

*Leo Buscaglia*



Above: Sunset, Skyline Drive, Luray, Virginia, by Jay OBrien, Field Contributor. Nikon D200, focal length 65mm, f/11 at 1/10 second, auto exposure mode, ISO 100.

Cover: Palo\_Duro\_Canyon State Park near Amarillo, Texas, by Jim L. Shoemaker, Field Contributor. Canon EOS 5DS R, Canon EF24-105mm F4L IS USM lens, focal length 28mm, f/22, evaluative metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 100.

*"A loving heart is the truest wisdom."*  
*Charles Dickens*

Front Cover: Palo Duro Canyon State Park near Amarillo, Texas, by Jim L. Shoemaker, Field Contributor.

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Helen Longest-Saccone  
Photography by Jon and Diana LeVasseur

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Printed in Canada

Back Cover: Sunrise, Confusion Range, Great Basin National Park, Nevada, by Rinus Baak, Field Contributor.



ADVERTISER

Mustang stallions near Green River, Wyoming.

Above: Running mustang stallion, by Diana LeVasseur, Field Contributor. Canon EOS 7D Mark II, Canon EF300mm F2.8L USM lens, f/5.6 at 1/1250 second, evaluative metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 320, handheld.

Right: Roan mustang stallion, by Jon LeVasseur, Field Contributor. Canon EOS 7D Mark II, Canon EF300mm F2.8L USM lens, f/5 at 1/800 second, evaluative metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 320, handheld.

*“No philosophers so thoroughly comprehend us as dogs and horses.”*  
*Herman Melville*

An author of one of the articles in this issue mentioned he had observed that I had a soft spot in my heart for horses. He is correct. Horses speak to me of freedom. They are truth and poetry in motion. I feel that horses are unique and special. They are honest.

When searching for a quote about horses, I found the one above by Herman Melville. It speaks to my heart. I'm sure no human has ever understood me as much as a mustang named Desi (Desert Sands). Desi taught me more in two years about who I am than I had managed to figure out in over 60 years of living. And our little dog, Phyllis, regularly teaches me a great deal. To deepen all my lessons from Desi and Phyllis (and the dogs before her), on December 18, 2014, I met a newborn calf named Wish2.

Spending time with Wish2 as she's grown into a beautiful adult heifer has deepened my appreciation for cows. But, more importantly, she's taught me that I am small. Yes, small physically, but tiny and unimportant in the grand scheme of life. I can have Wish2's full attention and suddenly the hay calls to her, she decides that a drink of water is important, or she chooses to rejoin her bovine herd members, and I'm left standing alone. Does Wish2 love me? Yes. She and I often stand in a circle of love. But she lives her life in the moment. Sometimes I'm part of that moment; other times I'm not.

The beauty of it all is that Wish2 is free of expectations and judgment. She is self-confident. She knows her place and her needs—hay, a pasture of green grass, water, and being part of a herd.

Do I know my needs? Am I honestly free of expectations and judgment of self and others? Am I confident enough to politely walk away when something else demands my attention? Can I say “no” in a kind manner and focus on the task in front of me?

The animals in my life are honest and non-judgmental. Often, when we are together, they find something more interesting than I am to them, and they are off. It doesn't mean they don't love me. They could return to me at any moment. The animals I share my life with are self-confident and, let me add, they are free of self-imposed limitations. Being with them forces me to stay in the moment.

So, yes, I have a soft spot for horses, and also for dogs and cows. I want to continue to learn from my animal companions, and to daily live in a confident and joyful manner, free from self-imposed limitations.

Thank you for your readership of *Nature Photographer*. We exist because of you, and it truly is a pleasure to talk with you when you call.

We wish you peace, love, and superb spring photography adventures. Marty and I send our best wishes to you for days that are filled with joy!

*Love, Helen*



Images by Marty Saccone. Top: Desi and Helen. Above Right: Phyllis and Helen. Above: Wish2 and Helen.

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PAGE NO.

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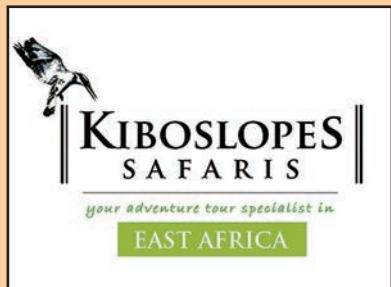
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*"Nature always wears  
the colors of the spirit."  
Ralph Waldo Emerson*

A large male basilisk lizard in a tree, from a May trip to Costa Rica, by Christopher J. Crowley, Field Contributor. Canon EOS 5D, Canon EF100-400mm F4.5-5.6L IS USM lens, focal length 400mm, f/5.6 at 1/200 second, evaluative metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 1250.



©Kristofer Rowe | Focal Length: 340mm | Exposure: F/6.3 1/2000sec | ISO: 800

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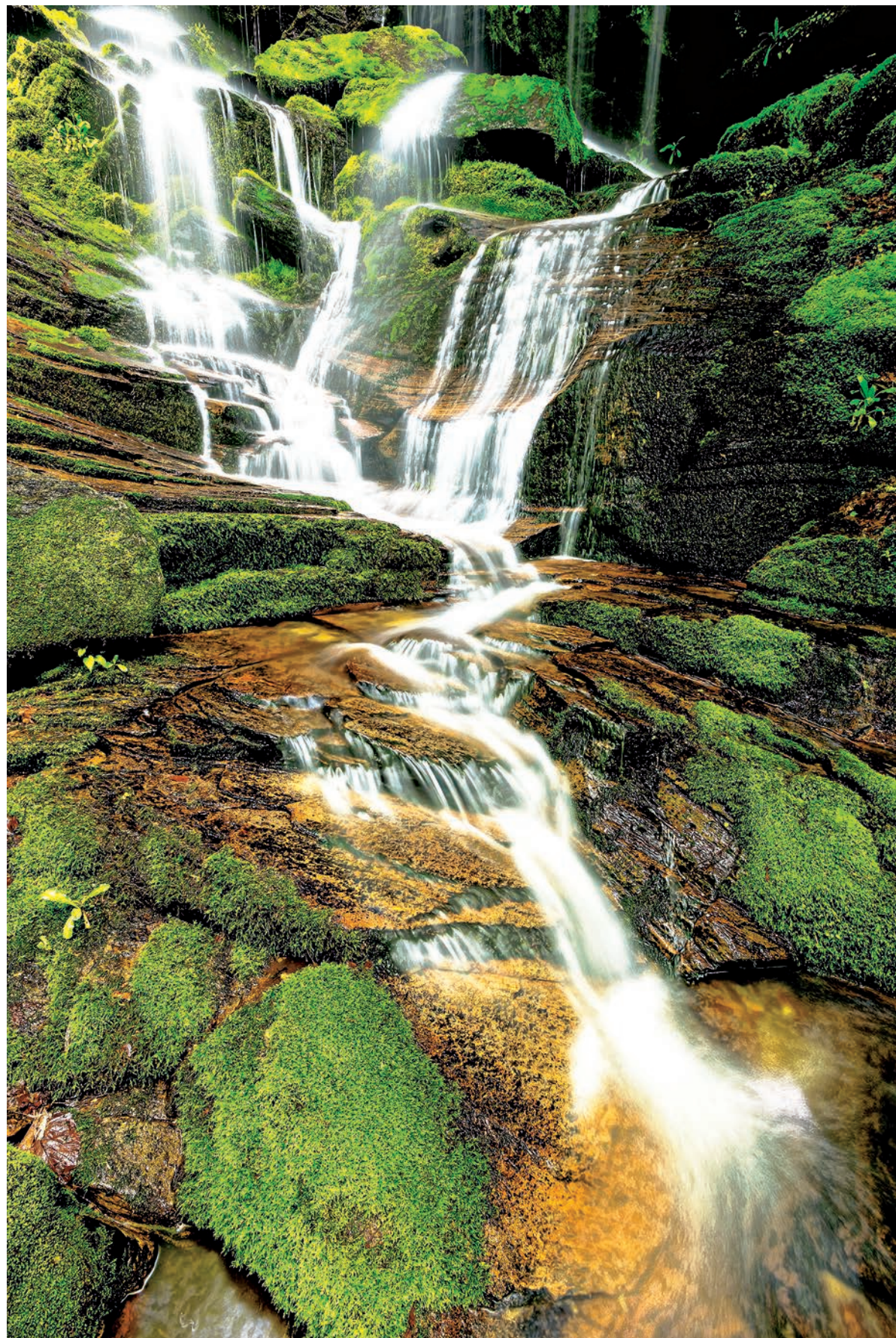
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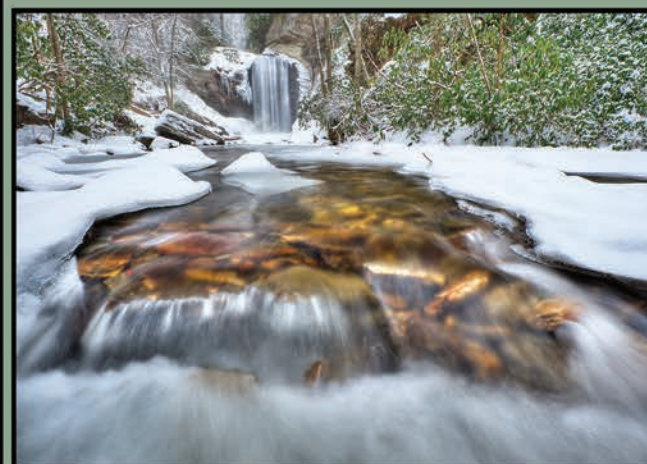


English falls, by Kevin Adams. Nikon D800, Nikon 17-35mm F2.8 lens, focal length 17mm, f/22 at 3 seconds, ISO 200.

# 2017 Photography Festivals

Kevin Adams Photography

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*It's going to be Wicked!*

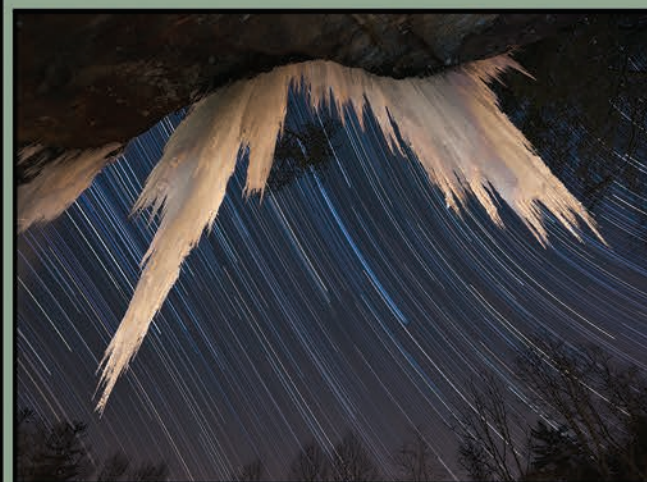
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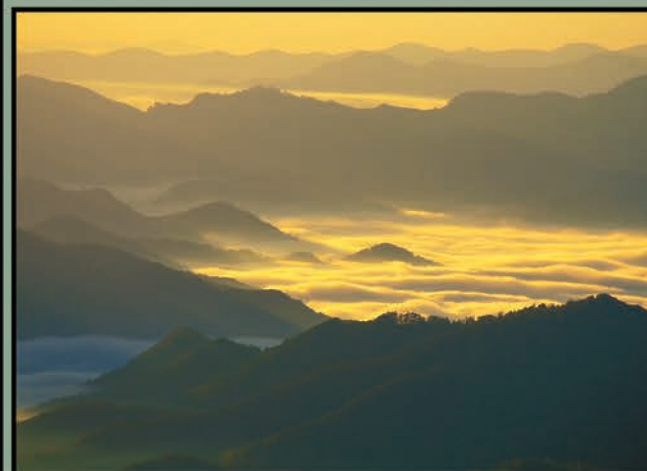
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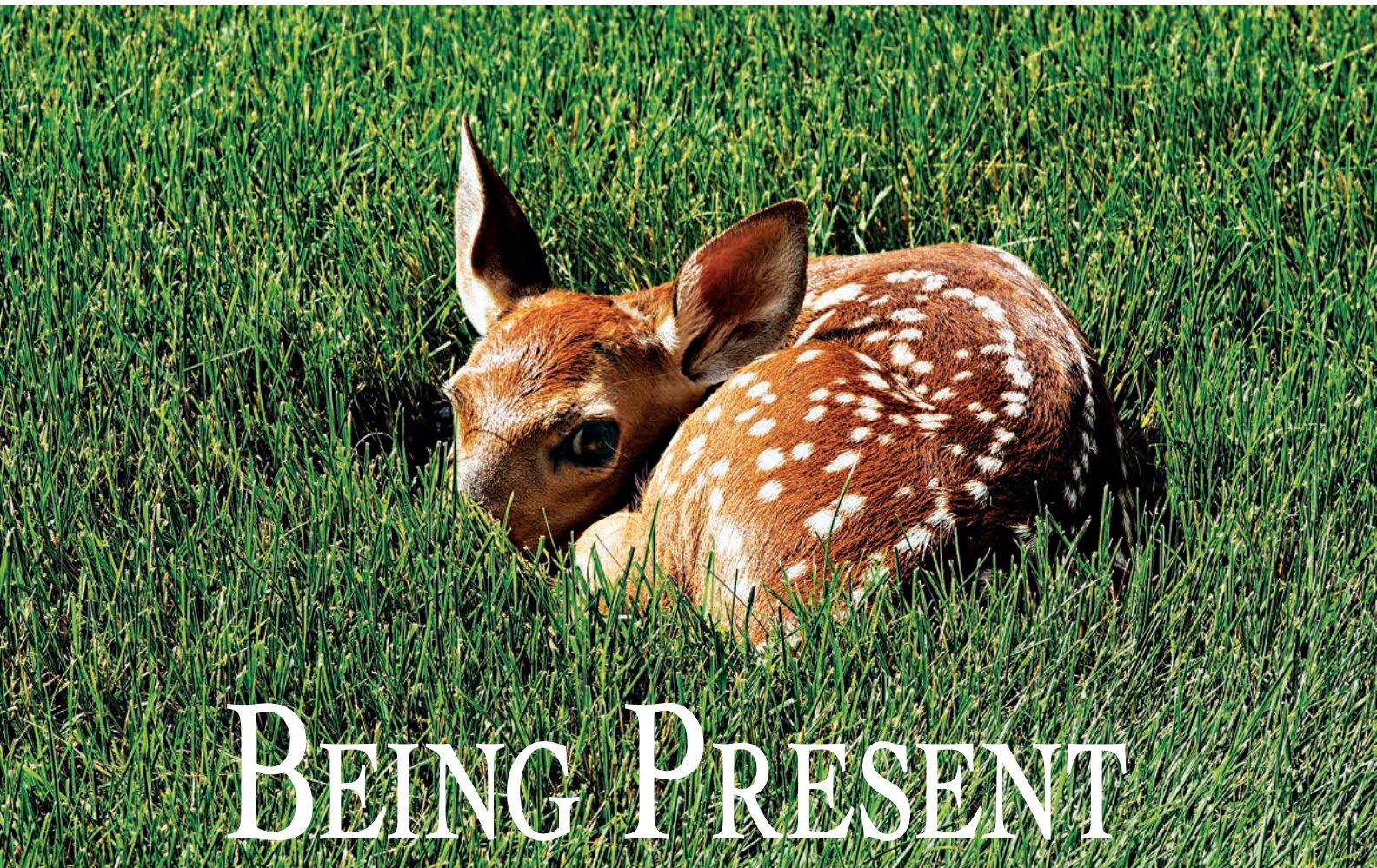
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- > Photo Shoots and Workshops
  - > Programs covering wide variety of subjects
  - > Portfolio Reviews
  - > Photo Contest
  - > Vendors



Images in Indiana, by Eugenia M. Mills.  
Left: Cooper's hawk. Canon EOS 70D, Canon EF100-400mm F4.5-5.6L IS USM lens, focal length 400mm, f/5.6 at 1/2500 second, manual exposure mode, evaluative metering mode, ISO 800.  
Below: Pileated woodpecker. Canon EOS 70D, Canon EF100-400mm F4.5-5.6L IS USM lens, focal length 190mm, f/5 at 1/500 second, manual exposure mode, evaluative metering mode, ISO 800.  
Facing Page: Fawn. Canon EOS 80D, Canon EF70-200mm F2.8L IS II USM lens, focal length 170mm, f/20 at 1/20 second, manual exposure mode, evaluative metering mode, ISO 100.

# BEING PRESENT WHERE YOU ARE

Article and Photography by Eugenia M. Mills, Field Contributor

During my school years, the teacher often began class by calling the roll, and each student would respond by saying "present." Teachers hoped the student was more than physically present: was tuned in to the surroundings, listening, anticipating what was to happen, and eager to participate in all that was offered in the environment. Douglas Steere wrote that being present where you are is being "all there." Being present is also important for the avid photographer who wants to capture nature photographs.

Recently I have been very conscious of "being present" within my surroundings. A big change occurred in my life when I sold my Ohio home and moved to my church retirement facility in Indiana. I moved into the section of small homes

where persons live independently until such time that more care is needed. The move was made as winter approached, which was a difficult time to create a new beginning. Folks spent more time indoors, which made it difficult to interact with neighbors; the weather was not the best for traveling to explore the community. I wondered how I could adjust to a new place, new neighbors, make new friends, and continue some of the activities that I had enjoyed throughout my life. How should I focus, or "be present," and aware of what was around me?

I began to explore the area around my home and placed bird feeders just outside a back window. The ravine behind the house was a too deep for hiking. Bare branches of trees

and bushes rimmed the gully, which allowed visibility into the ravine. I soon discovered that wildlife enjoyed the narrow valley, and I began watching nature out my back windows.

Deer walked through the ravine searching for vegetation. Snow soon drove birds and squirrels to my feeders. As might be expected, birds at the feeder frequently attracted a predator, a Cooper's hawk. As the winter continued, I spent a lot of time at my window, busy with my camera.

I shared several photos with one of the facility administrators. She was thrilled, and suggested it would be nice to have a collage of photos on the bulletin board in the Big House. Persons living in this building were less independent and focused on accomplishing activities of daily living. The administrator hoped the photos would encourage residents to look out their windows and witness the world beyond their rooms. I created a collage in Photoshop and titled it, "What's Outside Your Window?" After enjoying several posters with a variety of subjects, the residents began looking for my photo-

graphs and enjoyed talking about the wildlife around the facility.

We had snow in mid-April, which covered the bird feeder. On that feeder sat a male cardinal, a house finch, a chickadee, a male and female American goldfinch, and a downy woodpecker. It was unusual to see a male goldfinch in full summer plumage sitting in the snow. I grabbed my camera and snapped a photo of the wide variety of birds and colors. Across that photograph, I wrote a verse from a child's song, "Red and yellow, black and white, all are precious in His sight." I hoped this photo and verse would inspire us to see our world with a more caring perspective.

I knew the residents enjoyed the wildlife photos when I was stopped and asked when more pictures would be displayed. One spring morning, I knew they watched for wildlife outside their windows when a resident alerted me to a baby deer on the lawn. Of course, I hurried out to see the new white-tailed fawn. The mother deer left her newborn in plain sight, as the residents watched in wonder. Many people observed, and some were concerned about the fawn's well being. The mother deer must have felt these elderly persons would be a safe group to watch over her little one on the first day of life. I was able to stand at a distance with a telephoto lens and take several shots. That close up image resulted in a reprimand from a lady who did not understand a telephoto lens, and thought I had gotten too close to take the photo.

Spring brought more opportunities for photography around the facility. The pond attracted wildlife to admire and photograph. The mallards and Canada geese displayed large families, bullfrogs croaked mating calls, and painted turtles multiplied. I was often blessed to see migrating birds as they stopped briefly in the ravine. A great crested flycatcher and a rose-breasted grosbeak rested on a limb outside my window.

Summer brought flowers, hummingbirds and butterflies. A pileated woodpecker family lived nearby, and the parents brought two youngsters to the suet feeders and taught them to find insects on tree trunks.

One morning the sunrise cast a beautiful rose color throughout the sky; I rushed to the pond to get some photos. The white puffy clouds had turned a gorgeous pink, which reflected on the pond. When I hung this photo for the residents, I wrote the old saying, "Red in the morning, sailors take warning" at the top. This old adage proved to be true, as storms developed later in the day, and seven tornadoes touched down across the state.

"Being present" to life around me has allowed this aging photographer wonderful opportunities to photograph, regardless of

bad weather or difficult terrain. My photography gave me the chance to meet people and develop new friendships. I was able to use equipment I already owned, which included Canon 70D and 80D cameras, Canon 100-400mm lens and 70-200mm lens, Tamron 28-300mm lens, and an Induro (CX213) tripod. Wildlife is sensitive to movement at the window. So, to capture the perfect shot, I have the camera set and ready to fire with a cable, or use a camouflage curtain with an opening for the lens.

During summer I had access to a beautiful flower garden situated in the afternoon sun. Often butterflies and hummingbirds were present. I used my 70-200mm F2.8 lens when photographing hummingbirds. This lens combined with the bright sun allows a very fast shutter speed. When the hummingbirds are at my feeder, I use a technique learned in a workshop with Joe and Mary Ann McDonald, "four flashes with flash trigger will freeze the wings."

Fantastic photos will develop when one is "present where you are!" NP



Sunrise, Indiana, by Eugenia M. Mills. Canon EOS 80D, Tamron 28-300mm lens, focal length 28mm, f/4.5 at 1/125 second, manual exposure mode, evaluative metering mode, ISO 800.

**nature's image**

*2017 Photography Field Workshops*

- April 26-29: Scenics & Spring Wildflowers, Cass, WV
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# ENDANGERED No MORE



Article and Photography by Chuck Graham, Field Contributor

Chuck's web site: <https://chuckgrahamphoto.com> (Click for Live Link)

Santa Cruz Island is the largest isle off the California Coast, and part of the Channel Islands National Park. On a solo kayak trip circumnavigating it, I landed inside a nameless cove where a freshwater spring converged with the ocean. I quickly realized I'd have to share the year-round water source with one of the most endangered animals on the planet.

That evening, lying in my tent, I watched an inquisitive island fox effortlessly scale the outside wall of my two-person dome tent, easily maneuvering between the drenched rain fly and the roof. Once on the roof, we stared at each other, the housecat-sized island fox searching for a way in. When it was finally satisfied there was no way inside, it bounded down

the other side of my tent to investigate the rest of the campground on Santa Cruz Island.

Not long ago, the Channel Islands National Park was nearly void of the tiny endemic island fox, the largest land predator on the windswept northern chain. At the turn of the century, as few as 55 foxes barely survived in the wild on mountainous Santa Cruz Island. Even more gripping, only 15 foxes each remained on nearby Santa Rosa and San Miguel Islands. The three-to-five pound island fox was quickly spiraling into extinction.

Multiple agencies—the Channel Islands National Park, The Nature Conservancy, The Institute for Wildlife Studies, among others—pulled together and, with hundreds of volunteers, and one of the rarest foxes in the world has exceeded all expectations. It was removed from the Endangered Species List August 11, 2016, the quickest recovery of a land mammal in the history of the Endangered Species Act (established by Congress in 1973).

“We were in fear of losing the island fox,” said Russell Galipeau, superintendent of the Channel Islands National Park since 2003. “Tim Coonan brought me an island fox recovery plan, and I knew if we didn’t implement it right away that it was going to be a big challenge to save the fox.”

“The cooperative conservation effort that occurred was a real role model,” said Coonan, who for 23 years was the lead terrestrial biologist at the Channel Islands National Park, and spearheaded island fox recovery from 1999 until he retired in 2015. He now heads Friends of the Island Fox, a non-profit for everything island fox.

There were actions on the ground immediately, even before the island fox was listed. Beginning in 1999 and into the early part of the 21st century, a four-pronged effort ensued that returned an ecological balance to the craggy, volcanic isles. Aggressive captive breeding took place for each subspecies of island fox, because if one subspecies was lost, then it was gone forever. Those captive breeding



Island fox, Santa Cruz Island, Channel Islands National Park, California, by Chuck Graham.

Above: Canon EOS 7D, Canon EF300mm F4L IS USM lens, focal length 300mm, f/6.3 at 1/800 second, partial metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 100.

Facing Page: Canon EOS 7D, Canon EF300mm F4L IS USM lens, focal length 300mm, f/5 at 1/400 second, partial metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 100.

facilities remain in place on each of the three islands in the event of a distemper outbreak or if some other stressor arises on the chain.

That was 17 years ago when it was actually quite rare to see one of the cinnamon-colored foxes bounding through a campground or nimbly scaling a spindly fig tree. It was a time when opportunistic non-native golden eagles ruled the skies preying upon the three unsuspecting subspecies of island foxes. By 2004 all three subspecies at the National Park had been added to the Endangered Species List.

Feral pigs on Santa Cruz Island had lured golden eagles from the mainland. The swine population had swelled to roughly 5000 running roughshod across the rocky islet. Eventually all 43 golden eagles were trapped and relocated to the northeastern California mainland. The restoration of bald eagles—extinct from the islands for 50 years due to DDT poisoning—occurred from 2002-2006, allowing the iconic raptors to reestablish historic and island territories. Bald eagles feed on fish, not catlike island foxes.

By 2008 the last of the feral pigs were removed from Santa Cruz Island by a company in New Zealand called Pro Hunt, which specializes in eradicating non-native animals from islands. That opened the door for island foxes to flourish across the archipelago. It was initially thought that Santa Cruz Island had a carrying capacity of approximately 1200 to 1500 island foxes, but estimates from 2015 show a population infusion of 2100 animals on the largest, most biodiverse island off the California Coast. Impressive to say the least, considering the persistent drought conditions that have gripped the Golden State the last several years.

“This is super exciting,” said Ashley Spratt, public affairs officer for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “It’s a sign of hope as a conservation community coming together, pooling their resources. The island fox is a symbol for the islands. It is a real success story.”

Island foxes are extremely curious. Those who want to explore the richly diverse archipelago will have to get accustomed to these little rascals sniffing around their kayaks. NP



Island fox, Santa Cruz Island, Channel Islands National Park, California, by Chuck Graham. Canon EOS 7D, Canon EF300mm F4L IS USM lens, focal length 300mm, f/6.3 at 1/800 second, partial metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 100.

©Wil Mijer | Focal length: 90mm Exposure: F/4 1/125sec



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# INFINITE PATTERNS

Article and Photography by Claudette J. Devereaux, Field Contributor

Claudette's web site: [www.claudettejdevereauxphotography.com](http://www.claudettejdevereauxphotography.com) (Click for Live Link)



The contours of the sandy terrain change with a swift morning breeze, and displaced grains of sand congregate, forming new patterns on a perpetual canvas. This natural formation of sand dunes provides the ideal platform for such an impressive and spontaneous work of art. Observing a plethora of dunes, with infinite wind-blown geometric patterns etched along their walls, has me spellbound!

This hidden dune belt is located along the banks of Lac Naila (Lake Naila) in southern Morocco. The contrast of the dunes and the body of water makes for compelling photography. These isolated sand dunes have been eclipsed by their larger, more popular counterparts; nonetheless, they belong to the infamous Sahara Desert. "Sahara" is Arabic for "desert." Its massive landscape spans 3000 miles in North Africa and covers eleven countries: Morocco, Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Eritrea,

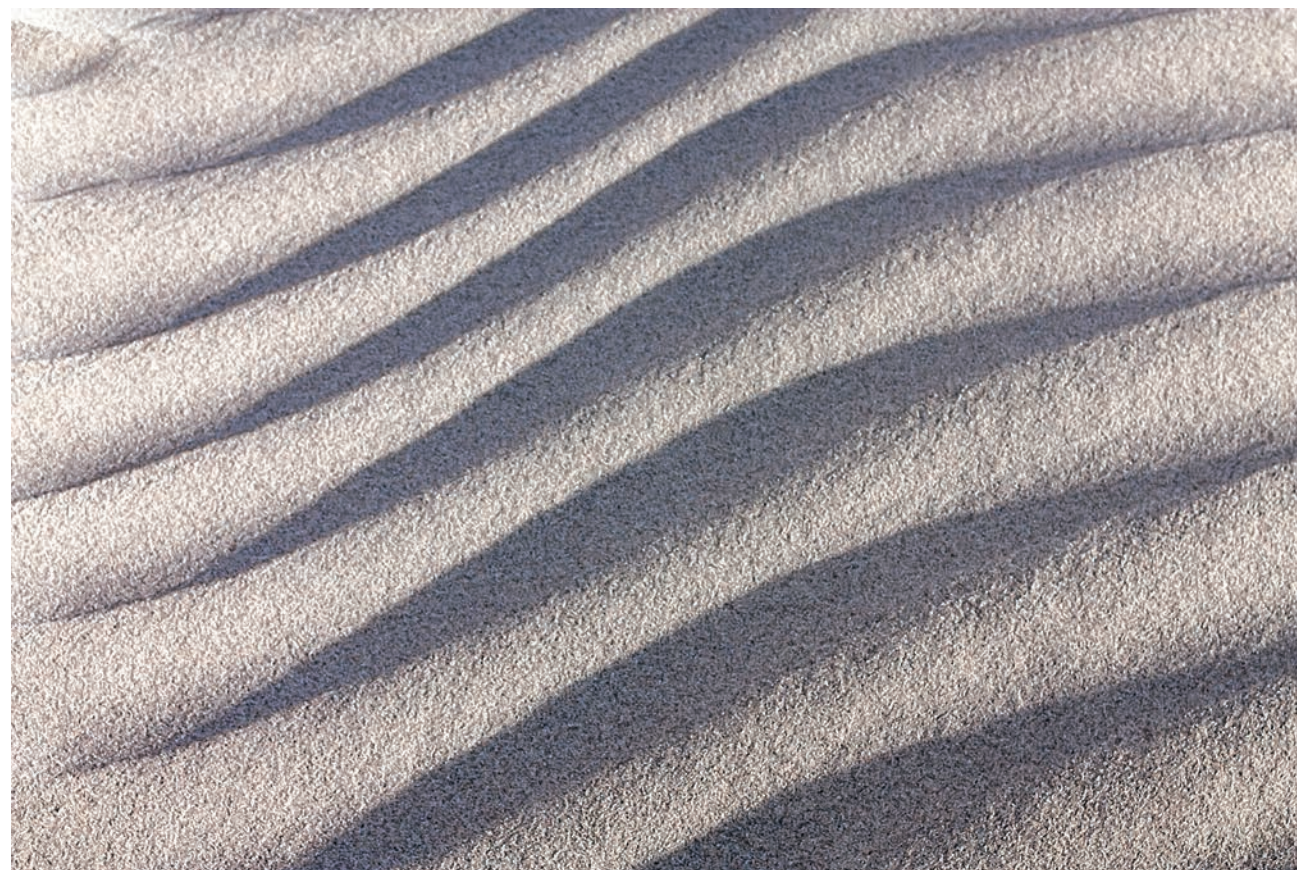
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Dunes and dune patterns, Lac Naila (Lake Naila) in southern Morocco, by Claudette J. Devereaux.

Left: iPhone 6, f/2.2 at 1/1200 second, pattern metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 32.

Facing Page Top: Canon EOS Digital REBEL XSi, +EF-S18-55mm F3.5-5.6 IS lens, focal length 35mm, f/8 at 1/100 second, evaluative metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 100.

Facing Page Bottom: Canon EOS Digital REBEL XSi, EF-S18-55mm F3.5-5.6 IS lens, focal length 35mm, f/7.1 at 1/60 second, evaluative metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 100.





Dune patterns, Lac Naila (Lake Naila) in southern Morocco, by Claudette J. Devereaux. Canon EOS Digital REBEL XSi, EF-S18-55mm F3.5-5.6 IS lens, focal length 37mm, f/7.1 at 1/100 second, evaluative metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 100.

Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Sudan, and Tunisia. In the driest regions, summers have reached a record of 130 degrees Fahrenheit. During the winter, temperatures can plummet below freezing. Rain is almost nonexistent, less than three inches a year. Nomads (roaming tribes) are indigenous to this region and are accustomed to austere and simple living. Fortunately, camels tolerate being without food and water for up to two weeks. They are the staple for desert survival, transporting people and supplies over such treacherous terrain.

Dunes vary in sizes. The largest of the Sahara is nearly 600 feet high, yet only twenty-five percent of the Desert is made up of dunes. The remaining seventy-five percent consists of stone plateaus, gravel plains, and sand flats. It is a harsh and desolate landscape. The most popular, larger dune belt is Erg Chebbi, located 549 miles north of Lac Naila. It has become the mecca for tourism where the colossal dunes offer an array of activities, including ATV and camel rides, trekking, and desert bivouac (camping).

In May 2016, I attended a two-week photo tour of Morocco, offered by Rosa Frei, founder of Rosa Frei Photography. Her driver, Habib, diligently drove us over the Atlas Mountains, through numerous Berber villages and coastal towns. I got an in-depth exposure to life in the villages off the beaten path. Photographing the Moroccan culture was enlightening, from their colorful clothing of kaftans

(adorned by women) and gandoras (worn by men), to roadside dining on the traditional north African dish of couscous (steamed grains topped with vegetables and meat or fish), to the legendary “goats in a tree.” I was greeted with warmth and hospitality, and constantly offered their signature hot-mint tea as a welcoming gesture; one I graciously accepted.

The epitome of the tour was reaching the quaint fishing town of Akhfenir, home to Lac Naila and the enchanted sand dunes. As we cruised along a dead-end dirt road into town, we found ourselves perpendicular to the lake. The secluded dunes were located a few miles away, easily accessible via boat. We approached a small group of fishermen intending to hire one of them to transport the three of us to the dunes, round-trip, over the next two days. The agreement was sealed with a handshake, and the adventure commenced the following morning at six-thirty a.m.

I awakened before dawn, anxious about exploring the dunes. Hamdi, the gregarious fisherman, eagerly loaded us into his blue-and-white skiff. This type of vessel, a small sixteen-foot flat-bottom boat with an outboard motor, is typically used by fishermen on lakes and rivers. The fifteen minute journey was pleasant, the temperature comfortable in the low 70s Fahrenheit.

Gliding down the rich fish-filled azure lake, we passed an islet vibrant with green vegetation and a flock of pink and white flamingoes. I photographed their elegant stature with

my Canon Rebel XSi. Hamdi announced, in Arabic, that he would guide the boat closer to them. As we approached, he rapidly clapped his hands which startled the flock, and the flamingoes took flight. Fortunately, I was able to capture their graceful ascent. More astounding was the fact that flamingoes can fly!

Miles of white sandy beaches ran parallel to the banks of Lac Naila, prior to its waters merging with the Atlantic Ocean. Our skiff docked, and the classic metal hook anchor was

secured in the pristine sand. I disembarked in disbelief. We were surrounded by deserted sand dunes. I was amazed that this hidden gem, part of the Sahara Desert, wasn't illustrated in the history books! Embraced in a spiritual moment, I actually did a slow 360-degree turn to absorb this majestic beauty.

I gingerly approached the dunes, feeling guilty for making footprints, an impression I prayed was temporary. The sand grains, as fine as sugar, differed from the sand at Erg



*“I have always  
loved the desert.  
One sits down on a  
desert sand dune,  
sees nothing,  
hears nothing.  
Yet through the silence  
something throbs,  
and gleams.”  
Antoine de Saint-Exupery*

Dunes, Lac Naila (Lake Naila) in southern Morocco, by Claudette J. Devereaux. iPhone 6, f/2.2 at 1/4000 second, pattern metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 32.

Chebbi. Rosa explained it's lighter in consistency and color, sometimes appearing white. The dunes here were also much smaller, thirty to seventy feet, compared to 500 feet. Tourists, camels, ATVs, and Nomads were nowhere to be found.

Rosa remarked that the sky was moody when dark clouds came upon us, but inclement weather couldn't deter me from exploring this dune belt. We had to shield our lenses with plastic. Fortunately the precipitation was light and brief.

Lac Naila has a coastal breeze that sculpts the dunes. The geometric wavy, linear, and curved lines, shadows, and hues, were striking! "Footprints of the wind," Rosa said.

As a visual artist, I'm drawn to patterns, textures, and shadows. I had entered a photographer's paradise! The vast variety of dunes complemented the infinite patterns they possessed. An array of shapes, sizes, sand colors, and the rare sighting of a bushel of vegetation, classified this territory as distinctive.

To avoid altering the sand patterns, I decided to leave my tripod behind and hand-hold the camera, an uncommon practice in landscape photography. With such an attractive landscape, it was easy to attain a classic composition with my Canon, Pentax, and iPhone. The patterns were displayed in the foreground, dunes in the middle, the lake and sky in the background—priceless!

Gusts of mild whistling wind became more frequent and blew sand in my mouth, a minor inconvenience. I continued

to shoot, managing to shield my lens from taking a direct hit. I was driven to capture art in motion! Noticing my entrance with the scenery, Rosa alerted me not to zoom my lens until the wind subsided. I concurred, as specks of sand could get trapped in my lens and render it inoperable.

Most of the dunes are adjacent to each other, and we climbed several to gain access to the highest one, but penetrating the wall caused instability. Sand seeped out from under my feet with each step. Whether ascending or descending, conquering the dunes was arduous. After a tumble, followed by dune-climbing guidance from Rosa, I succeeded in completing the dune climb.

By nine a.m. we concluded the morning shoot and returned to the skiff. While we were exploring the dunes, Hamdi had taken the opportunity to net his catch of the day. Seating was now limited because schools of fish occupied most of the boat. Laughing aloud, I realized this was truly an adventure!

The second day encompassed us with a bright sunny sky and beautiful clouds no longer moody. The sun illuminated glistening specks imbedded throughout the sand. It was truly breathtaking! This was such an atypical subject to photograph; a flawless beauty found only in nature.

And, on this second day of trekking, I noticed our previous footprints had been eradicated by the wind—as if we were never there!

NP



Dunes, Lac Naila (Lake Naila) in southern Morocco, by Claudette J. Devereaux. Canon EOS Digital REBEL XSi, EF-S18-55mm F3.5-5.6 IS lens, focal length 21mm, f/8 at 1/200 second, evaluative metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 200.

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Red knots, Kiawah Island, South Carolina, by Shauneen Hutchinson. Nikon D800, Nikkor 70-200mm F2.8 lens, focal length 220mm, f/14 at 1/400 second, matrix metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 400.

# FOLLOWING THE RED KNOT

Article and Photography by Shauneen Hutchinson, Field Contributor

It's easy to become enchanted by the story of the red knot: mind-boggling feats of physical strength and courage; an intriguing symbiotic relationship with the horseshoe crab; a dramatic threat of extinction. And, on top of all that, they're really pretty cute. So, if you will, please take a few minutes to meet this extraordinary bird.

The particular type of red knot that migrates along the Atlantic Ocean Flyway is technically from the *rufa* subspecies of *Calidris canutus*, just one of a number of shorebirds that fly north each year to breed, but special in so many ways.

Its yearly migration covers nearly 20,000 miles roundtrip. They winter in numerous areas along the Atlantic, but can actually spend the season as far south as Tierra del Fuego at the tip of South America. After wintering for about three-and-a-half-months, the birds will spend the next six-and-a-half months traveling to and from their breeding grounds in the Canadian Arctic.

Examining what it takes for a small shorebird about the size of a robin to complete such a journey reveals the importance of all the conditions that have to coalesce to make the bird's trip possible.

Migrating red knots generally travel in large flocks, perhaps in recognition of "safety in numbers." Wind and weather conditions must be optimal since travel extends for days at a time over thousands of miles. An unexpected storm can have a devastating effect.

As the red knots (a rather subdued gray-and-white in winter) prepare for flight, they molt to a flying coat and, eventually, brighten in the throat and belly to a shade of cinnamon, characteristic of breeding season. At the same time, their intestines shrink to prepare them for the lack of food on the journey.

Their migration north requires a number of stopovers where they will spend a few days or weeks to rest and refuel. The Delaware Bay area is, by far, the most popular refueling stop for Atlantic Flyway red knots. Up to 90 percent of the population may spend time there during the long flight, due to the relative abundance of eggs deposited by horseshoe crabs. These eggs are a source of protein quickly metabolized into fat by the feeding birds, thus providing them the essen-

tial nutrition for the final part of their journey to their Arctic breeding grounds. Easy and interesting—except the number of horseshoe crabs in the Delaware Bay has decreased precipitously in the past 15 years.

Watermen have long harvested the crabs for bait to catch high-priced eels and conch. As the horseshoe crab population decreased, researchers documented an alarming drop in the number of red knots in the migration route, with some scientists claiming a decline in population approaching 90 percent over the past two decades.

Thus the discussion of the red knots inevitably enters the politically-charged arena of determining whether they should be listed under the Endangered Species Act. The interaction of the birds and the crabs predictably involves a third species—human beings. Debate currently centers on how to preserve red knot population while addressing the demands of those who wish to use their fuel/food for other purposes.

In 2007, New Jersey imposed a highly contentious moratorium on harvesting horseshoe crabs, but none of the other states in the Delaware Bay area followed suit. During a visit to that region in May 2012, Dr. Larry Niles, a wildlife biologist with the Conserve Wildlife Foundation of New Jersey, observed that there hasn't been any improvement in the numbers of horseshoe crabs, and warned, "Red knots are fast heading towards extinction, and the [endangered species] listing of the knot is imminent. Other species, like the ruddy turnstone, will almost certainly follow, as well as some of the 60 percent of shorebird species now in decline." In describing efforts to address the issues, he says, "The main component missing is the public will."

If you've become sufficiently enchanted with the story of the red knots, don't miss the fascinating PBS documentary written, directed, and produced by Allison Argo and featuring Dr. Niles, titled "Crash: A Tale of Two Species." (Just enter the title in your computer's Internet search engine.) It's an interesting and important account of the interaction of red knots, horseshoe crabs, and the humans they encounter.

Once they've completed the daunting journey from their winter headquarters to the Canadian Arctic, the red knots will spend about three months there. Males dig nests in small

depressions in the ground where the female lays three or four pale olive-colored eggs. Both parents incubate the eggs, with the male doing most of that work over the 22 days. Shortly after fledging occurs, the parents and young prepare to fly south to their winter habitat.

The journey back to winter headquarters once again calls for long periods of flight subject to daunting wind and weather conditions, as well as hunters with guns.

By 2015 red knots had become a source of increasing concern for scientists all over the world. That year the United States Fish and Wildlife Service listed the *rufa* red knot as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. This is the first bird listed expressly because global warming imperils its existence, and the Service noted it is "in danger of extinction in the next few decades."

Writing in the May-June issue of *Audubon*, noted red knot expert Deborah Cramer (award-winning author of *The Narrow Edge: A Tiny Bird, an Ancient Crab, and an Epic Journey*) details the specifics of how climate change has affected the birds' nesting grounds, food sources, and ability to thrive. Other factors include: a shrinking Arctic tundra, rising seas,

ocean acidification, increasingly stormy weather, and dependence on specialized environments such as the Delaware Bay. She observes, "As the consequences of global warming begin to resonate along the Flyway, how we face what is perhaps the greatest ethical crisis of our generation will determine not only their fate, but the fate of millions of shorebirds."

In May 2016, articles in both *The Atlantic* and *Science* magazines reported the findings of a group of scientists from around the world headed by Jan A. van Gils from the Department of Coastal Systems, NIOZ Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research, and Utrecht University. They noted that juvenile red knots bred in the Arctic were smaller after summers with early snow melts. Their shorter beaks make it impossible for them to reach deep enough into the mud along their migration routes to obtain rich food to sustain them. They are left to rely on less-nourishing vegetation and are ill prepared for their long journeys to summer resting areas.

The red knot's story is a work in progress. Next time these amazing creatures arrive at our water's edge, perhaps we will all view them with renewed understanding and respect. NP



Red knots, Kiawah Island, South Carolina, by Shauneen Hutchinson. Nikon D800, Nikkor 70-200mm F2.8 lens, focal length 130mm, f/11 at 1/1250 second, matrix metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 400.



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# WILD HORSES McCULLOUGH PEAKS



Article and Photography by Rinus Baak, Field Contributor

Rinus' web site: <http://www.rinusbaakphotography.com> (Click for Live Link)

As a long-time subscriber to *Nature Photographer* magazine, I have observed that its Editor-in-Chief has a soft heart for horses. Frequently the magazine will adorn its pages with images of wild horses and, from time to time, include articles about these hardy animals who have survived hundreds of years in a variety of inhospitable environments. It is no wonder, wild horses on the open range are a marvelous sight to behold. And, as the popularity of nature photography has grown, so has the desire of many photographers to include images of iconic wild horses in their portfolio.

Most wild horses roam the open spaces of our western states. Based on 2015 government estimates, there are more than 47,000 wild horses populating the western United States. These, now wild creatures, roam the high deserts and mountain valleys of our public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). In 1971 the Congress of the United States delegated the responsibility of managing, protecting and controlling wild horses and burros, under the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act, to the BLM. The prevailing theory is that horses were reintroduced to North America by Spanish explorers in the 1500s. Some of these domesticated horses escaped and dispersed north throughout the American west. Later, during the great western expansion of the 1800s more domestic horses escaped captivity. These feral, ancestral horses created the wild horse herds of today's western states.

There are many BLM locations, scattered among the western states, where wild horses can be photographed. Also, a number of photography workshops are offered to take photographers

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Wild horses at the McCullough Wild Horse Herd Management Area, by Rinus Baak.

Above: Canon EOS-1D Mark IV, Canon EF 70-200mm F2.8 IS II USM lens, focal length 145mm, f/8 at 1/1250 second, matrix metering, aperture priority, ISO 400, handheld.

Facing Page: Canon EOS-1D Mark IV, Canon EF70-200mm F2.8 IS II USM lens, focal length 110mm, f/8 at 1/500 second, aperture priority mode, matrix metering mode, handheld, ISO 400.





into the back country of Utah, New Mexico, Colorado and Nevada, to photograph the iconic wild mustangs. Perhaps the locations most known for wild horse photography is Pryor Mountain in Montana. The relatively small group of wild horses on Pryor Mountain has gotten a lot of press. The Pryor Mountain horses, particularly Cloud, have starred in fascinating documentary films and have been captured in stunning images by many photographers. The horses and their high alpine setting are a magnet for photographers looking to round out their portfolio of images. The problem is that the Pryor Mountain herd of wild horses is not very accessible. The commitment and effort required to reach the herd and photograph the iconic horses is more than most can muster.

Fortunately, there are other exceedingly attractive alternatives, including the Sand Wash Basin in northwestern Colorado that was highlighted in the Summer 2015 issue of *Nature Photographer*. Another very viable alternative is the BLM's McCullough Peaks Wild Horse Herd Management Area in Wyoming. This management area contains almost as many horses as Pryor Mountain and is a very easy 25 highway miles east of Cody, Wyoming. The vast 109,814-acre area is managed by BLM's Cody Field Office. Reportedly, there are approximately 150 horses roaming this expansive high desert terrain. Locating the wild horses can be a challenge as they wander among the rolling hills and valleys of the management area in small family groups.

The McCullough Peaks' management area fronts Highway 14 and the Greybull Highway, east of Cody. At Mile Marker 74, on the left (north) side of the highway, is the Whistle Creek road sign,

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Wild stallions in aggressive posturing to determine dominance, by Rinus Baak. Canon EOS-1D Mark IV, Canon EF70-200mm F2.8 IS II USM lens, focal length 190mm, f/8 at 1/1250 second, matrix metering mode, aperture priority mode, handheld, ISO 400.



Wild horses, McCullough Peaks, Wyoming, by Rinus Baak.

Above: McCullough Peaks' wild stallions vying for available mares. Canon EOS-1D Mark IV, Canon EF70-200mm F2.8 IS II USM lens, focal length 110mm, f/20 at 1/400 second, -0.7 compensation, matrix metering mode, aperture priority mode, handheld, ISO 400.

Below: Two pinto-colored wild horses looking attentively at a photographer. Canon EOS-1D Mark IV, Canon EF70-200mm F2.8 IS II USM lens, focal length 180mm, f/8 at 1/800 second, matrix metering mode, aperture priority mode, handheld, ISO 400.



the primary entrance to access the horses. There is another entrance about half a mile past Mile Marker 79. Here you will have to open and close a barbed wire gate to gain access. Both these entrances are dirt tracks that weave through the rolling hills and valleys of the management area and branch into a network of connecting tracks. The dirt roads are rough but passable, unless wet, with a high clearance vehicle, although four-wheel drive is a definite advantage.

Spotting the wild horses may take some practice. Binoculars are a necessary accoutrement. After spotting the first wild horses, subsequent groups become easier to recognize and locate. Typically, the horses will be in small groups ranging from about a dozen to as many as 40 or 50 horses. The larger the gathering, the easier it will be to spot them. The diversity of coat colors make the horses stand out from the sage-covered terrain and fairly easy to pick out with field glasses. A distant cloud of dust is frequently a good indication that horses are on the move. Once seen, the network of dirt roads will likely bring you close enough to the horses for some outstanding photography. If they have congregated close to the dirt track, photography can be accomplished right from around the vehicle. At other times, some tramping through the sagebrush may be necessary.

Even though genetically equipped for speed, the wild horses at McCullough Peaks are tolerant of humans and will not run off defensively when a vehicle approaches. Like all herbivores, however, they will wander slowly away from the vehicle, or photographer, as they forage on the

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Curious stallion checking out the intruder into its domain, by Rinus Baak. Canon EOS-1D Mark IV, Canon EF70-200mm F2.8 IS II USM lens, focal length 130mm, f/8 at 1/1250 second, matrix metering mode, aperture priority mode, handheld, ISO 400.



Wild-pinto colored horse, McCullough Peaks, Wyoming, by Rinus Baak.  
 Above: Horse getting up after a roll in the dirt. Canon EOS-1D Mark IV, Canon EF70-200mm F2.8 IS II USM lens, focal length 200mm, f/8 at 1/1600 second, matrix metering mode, aperture priority mode, handheld, ISO 400.  
 Below: Horse getting a back rub frolicking in the dirt. Canon EOS-1D Mark IV, Canon EF70-200mm F2.8 IS II USM lens, focal length 200mm, f/8 at 1/2000 second, matrix metering mode, aperture priority mode, handheld, ISO 400.



desert grasses. Also, like all grazers they mostly will have their heads down munching on vegetation. Patience needs to be exercised to capture action shots. Some of the more assertive horses can be very curious and approach quite close, checking out intruders into their realm. At those times it is possible to obtain close frame-filling portraits with medium and short telephoto lenses. For the most part, the ponies carry on with their normal behaviors. Mares graze while stallions patrol protectively around them or challenge other stallions with aggressive rearing and kicking.

The BLM has graded a number of watering holes throughout the management area. The water holes are a natural draw for the wild horses. They have to drink at least once a day, but when and where they will approach a waterhole is unpredictable. Only luck will bring a photographer to a waterhole during the golden light of day to capture reflections of the wild horses drinking.

Habitat conditions at the McCullough Peaks Wild Horse Herd Management Area are capable of supporting the component of wild horses that call it home. The horses are considered to be in good physical condition, stocky, of moderate to large size, and display a wide diversity of coat colors and patterns. The management area is easy to reach on a paved highway, close to a vibrant community, bisected with rough, but drivable (when dry), dirt roads that provide close access to the wild horses. It may not be Pryor Mountain, but McCullough Peaks will provide excellent photographic opportunities. NP

Small family group of McCullough Peaks' wild horses drinking at a watering hole constructed by the Bureau of Land Management, by Rinus Baak. Canon EOS-1D Mark IV, Canon EF70-200mm F2.8 IS II USM lens, focal length 120mm, f/10 at 1/200 second, matrix metering mode, aperture priority mode, handheld, ISO 400.



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# MAGICAL MAGEE MARSH

Article and Photography by Susan Puder, Field Contributor

Susan's web site: <http://www.eaglecreekphotos.com> (Click for Live Link)



Blackburnian warbler, by Susan Puder. Nikon D7100, Sigma 150-500mm F5-6.3 lens, focal length 300mm, f/7.1 at 1/500 second, matrix metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 800.



Northern parula warbler, by Susan Puder. Nikon D7100, Sigma 150-500mm F5-6.3 lens, focal length 500mm, f/7.1 at 1/1250 second, matrix metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 640.

**I**t's raining warblers! Hallelujah, it's raining warblers! To paraphrase a song from years ago, that's how I felt last spring on my first-day-ever birding Magee Marsh in Northwest Ohio. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Agency, there are over 49 million bird watchers in the United States, and it's one of the fastest growing outdoor activities in the country.

Northwest Ohio bills itself as the Warbler Capitol of the World, where the Black Swamp Bird Observatory annually sponsors "The Biggest Week in American Birding," which, in 2016, was May 6-15. Tens of thousands of birders pour into the area for birding programs and lectures, workshops, van tours, and guided trips. There are dozens of co-hosts from touring companies, to binocular/scope companies, to non-profit birding organizations.

Several members of the Southern Ocean Birding Group, the only birding group in Ocean County, New Jersey, decided to head west to view and photograph one of the best spring warbler migration locations in North America.

There are four major flyways in North America—Atlantic, Mississippi, Central, and Pacific. Birds travel these natural flyways in spring, heading north to breed; and back south in the fall, to winter in Central and South America. They essentially follow the food, as spring brings insects and seeds with the warmer weather. The southern shoreline of Lake Erie is a layover point for birds on the Mississippi flyway, where they stop to rest and feed before heading across the Great Lakes to their breeding grounds in Canada.

We chose to skip the masses and drove from southern Jersey to Ohio on May 15, the last day of the festival. After traveling through Pennsylvania for what seemed like a lifetime, we arrived at Maumee Bay State Park Lodge and Conference Center, in Oregon, Ohio—our residence for the next five days. Situated on the shoreline of Lake Erie, the Conference Center has a hotel with restaurant, and nearly two dozen rental cottages, complete with living room and full kitchen, which can accommodate from four to ten people. Plus, it was only 20 minutes from Magee Marsh. Other motels can be found in Port Clinton.

After unloading the cars, we headed out to wooded areas around our cottage in search of birds. We saw yellow warblers, vireos, indigo bunting, and a rare mourning warbler, all within walking distance.

The next day was simply amazing! We headed over to Magee Marsh, about 14 miles east of our location and about 25 miles from Toledo on Ohio Rt. 2. Mistakenly thinking most of the birders and photographers had headed home, we arrived to a packed parking lot. Once we found a spot, got our binoculars and cameras ready, we headed to the entrance of the boardwalk, which provides easy access from the West or East parking lots and encompasses about one mile around the wildlife area. There we joined dozens of others for a birding fallout, or “warbler wave.” A cold front pushing south with strong winds had held thousands of birds back, and that Monday, southerly winds took hold. Birds were everywhere: at eye-level; just over your head; it was wonderful!

There were birders with just binoculars, some with scopes (not really needed), and cameras of all sizes from smart phones to those with large lenses and tripods. It was so crowded the tripods really got in the way, as the boardwalk was only about six feet wide. Plus, the birds were so close, I had a hard time focusing the Sigma 150-500mm F5-6.3 APO lens on my Nikon D7100 camera.

I suggest a maximum zoom of 400mm for best results. I set my ISO at 640 to add light for a faster shutter speed, most often set at 1/1250, with exposure set at f/7.1, with matrix metering. I use aperture-priority mode, along with continuous high-speed release mode, and autofocus continuous-servo mode, so I can get several shots taken at a fast rate, as the birds are always on the move. Warblers aren't ones to sit around in trees waiting for photographers to adjust their camera for each shot. Depending on the light, I use my exposure compensation to underexpose the image when brighter light is available, and do the opposite when the lighting is darker.

Wood warblers are Neotropical migrants and primarily insect eaters, with a fine short bill they use to pick insects from branches and leaves, or off the ground. They are small colorful birds that inhabit woodlands, and were there to eat as much as they could as fast as they could. And they were



Trumpeter swans, by Susan Puder. Nikon D7100, Sigma 150-500mm F5-6.3 lens, focal length 220mm, f/7.1 at 1/1250 second, matrix metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 640.



Images by Susan Puder.

Right: Wilson's warbler. Nikon D7100, Sigma 150-500mm F5-6.3 lens, focal length 270mm, f/7.1 at 1/320 second, matrix metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 1000.

Above: Swainson's thrush. Nikon D7100, Sigma 150-500mm F5-6.3 lens, focal length 500mm, f/7.1 at 1/200 second, matrix metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 1000.



not alone; there were vireos, thrushes, orioles, robins, and three nesting pairs of bald eagles with young eaglets visible.

There are many parks in the area where birding can be done, including Pearson Metropark, Maumee Bay Lodge, Black Swamp, and Sheldon Marsh. At Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, right next to Magee Marsh, trumpeter swans were easily observed and heard with their distinctive trumpet-toots call. Other productive areas off the boardwalk at Magee include the pedestrian road, edges of the parking lots, the beach, and West Lawn. There are benches along the boardwalk to stop and rest and let the birds come to you, as well as areas to eat. Always bring your own food as there are no vendors or restaurants in the immediate area; and bring lots of water so you don't dehydrate, as I did.

The first day I took almost 1000 shots, thanking Noble Prize winner in Physics, George Smith, a friend from Ocean County, who helped bring us digital photography. If we were still using film, I'd be more judicious, but now I can just let it rip and look for those few dozen good photographs.

There were chestnut-sided northern parula, wilson's, prothonotary, blackburnian, yellow, Cape May, and bay-sided warblers. Several elusive Canada warblers drew large crowds that followed them along the boardwalk like a conga line, as they flew in and out of the underbrush. There were gray-cheeked and Swainson's thrushes, American woodcocks; as well as vireos including blue-headed, warbling, and Philadelphia. It was the best day I have ever had in 10 years viewing and photographing birds.

The next day it rained, so we visited other locations without much success. The rest of the week was, in truth, a letdown, even though the weather was beautiful. Not that there weren't birds to see, but the front had pushed many north and it was much harder to find and photograph them. I was spoiled from the first day and only worked those that were easy to get. The later highlight was the common nighthawks resting on trunks and branches. They caused quite a discussion as to whether they were nighthawks or whip-poor-wills, with the former winning out.

I strongly urge anyone who loves birds and photographing them, to take a spring trip to northwestern Ohio and visit the areas along Lake Erie. The Biggest Week in American Birding is during the first and second weeks in May. Species vary as to weather, but early arrivals can be found from the middle of April, with the Neotropical migrants coming in early- through mid-May. You won't be disappointed and will probably be as amazed as I was. Just bring lots of memory cards, a field guide, and patience for that perfect shot.

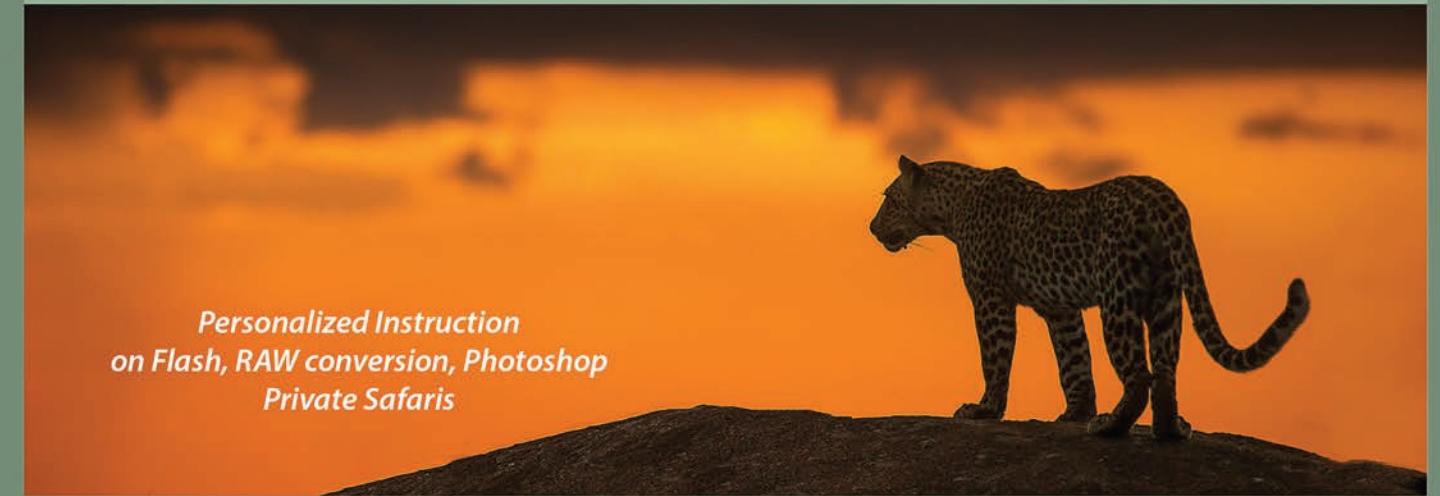
NP



Cape May warbler, by Susan Puder. Nikon D7100, Sigma 150-500mm F5-6.3 lens, focal length 270mm, f/7.1 at 1/400 second, matrix metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 1000.

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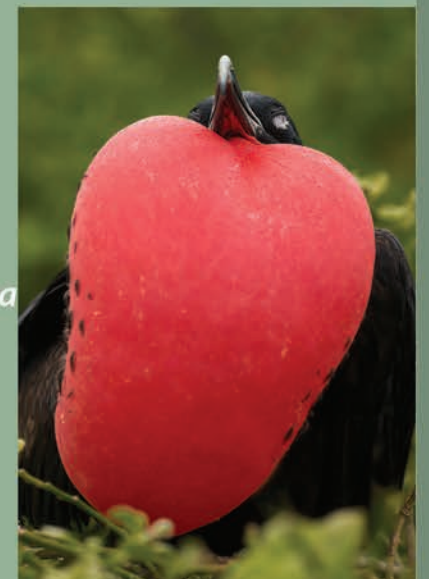
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# MICHIGAN'S NATURE THEATER IN THE ROUND

Article and Photography by Bob Feldman, Field Contributor

Bob's web site: <http://www.feldmanphotos.com> (Click for Live Link)

Secret places close to home give special satisfaction. On a pristine summer day, I went to such a place, an area unknown to my friends and neighbors, arriving about 8:00 a.m. I walked down a short series of steep switchbacks flanked by deciduous woods on both sides, which brought me to four or five steps. Before quietly climbing the stairs I checked the initial settings on my Canon 1D Mark III, as well as those on my Canon 600mm lens.

At the top I could pretty much survey most of the north bay of Ford Lake. The long oval bay features about a one-mile walking pathway and includes an elevated boardwalk around the side I was on, a dirt path, and small wooden arched footbridges over the water where the bay spills out.

The bay is a nature theater-in-the-round. I was the only audience at that moment, and free to move about the stage—natural scenery that extends on both sides of the viewer. Bay waters run a few feet under the boardwalk before they are contained by a steep-banked shoreline overgrown with lush and tangled vegetation.

The actors and action constantly change in this theater. The scenery also transforms subtly over time, more dramatically as the seasons move on. This morning, at the top of the stairs, I was greeted by a couple of great egrets, one too far away; the other too close for my 600mm lens, too bright, and not interesting enough. The egret studied me, too, and also decided to move on; slowly winging its elegant way across the bay.

I ambled along the boardwalk, paying particular attention to the shoreline and its many hiding spots. Painted turtles

basked in the morning's heat. A raccoon searching for breakfast beat a hasty retreat when it saw me. I apologized silently for the disturbance.

After a little while I came to some potential action and swung the tripod-mounted camera and lens off my shoulder. Fledgling barn swallows perched on the bank's greenery in good light. I focused on the youngsters and triggered the shutter in high-speed mode when I saw hungry mouths reflexively open wide.

I've become compulsively addicted to this location and return again and again. This summer past, I kept track of a pair of mute swans, beginning before the female laid her clutch of four eggs in a huge stick nest. I witnessed the tiny hatchlings looking like fluffy ping-pong balls bouncing among the white water lily pads. I remained focused on the swans until the end of their bittersweet season when only one cygnet survived, swimming, preening, and feeding close to its parents.

There were other birds too: a mature female and young belted kingfishers, but the elusive little birds never stayed or strayed within camera range. There were two or three young green herons, somewhat dull in color, but I was able to mark the places where a mature adult sometimes came out from the bushes to stalk and feed on fish. Patience and observation rewarded me with some decent green heron shots.

Later there were kingbirds, larger than the barn swallows, but with the young exhibiting the same behavior, more-or-less patiently perched on branches, waiting for someone to feed them. I again waited with them and got in a shot or two.



Mute swans, North Bay Park near downtown Ypsilanti, Michigan, by Bob Feldman.

Above: Canon EOS 5D Mark III, Canon EF800mm F5.6L IS USM lens with 1.4x III teleconverter, focal length 1120mm, f/11 at 1/3000 second, evaluative metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 500.

Below: Canon EOS 5D Mark III, Canon EF600mm F4L IS II USM lens with 2x III teleconverter, focal length 1200mm, f/11 at 1/500 second, evaluative metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 2000.



Wood ducks are my initial and continuing motivation for photographing in this area. The male wood duck in mating plumage can hold his own in any avian beauty contest. Unless park-fed by people, these fairly common American ducks are somewhat shy and can require patience to seek and find. They go into eclipse after the mating season and hide out, but the flashy drakes in fresh brilliant feathers reappear in the fall.

Somewhat ironically, the most fun was provided by common mallard chicks. One day an organized swarm of eight moved rapidly in close formation to the shore on some undisclosed mission, always under the watchful eye of the parental

hen in the background. Larger sweet-looking chicks played in twos or threes among the lily pads. Occasionally a youngster went off bravely—or foolishly—entirely on its own, unaware of the danger of huge snapping turtles lurking in the waters. Hawks and other predators call this place home, too.

Additional avian species included ubiquitous Canada geese, ring-billed gulls and the occasional herring gull, a tern or two, and, as the season changed, rafts of coots, pied-billed grebes, northern shovelers (the ducks famously described as being created by a committee), and double-crested cormorants. Along with birds, there were raccoons, three species of turtles, common carp boiling the bay waters like a witch's

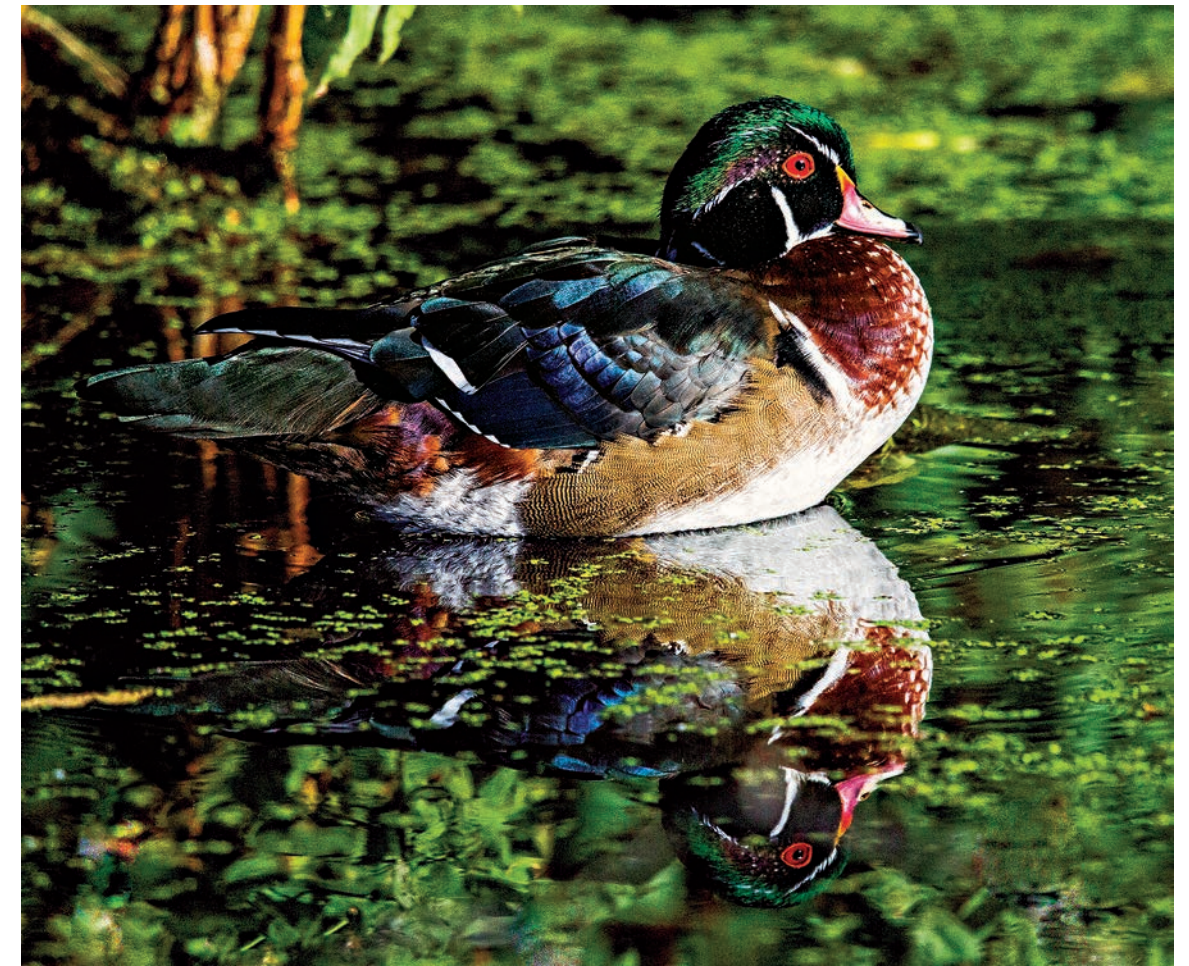


North Bay Park near downtown Ypsilanti, Michigan, by Bob Feldman.

Above: Coot. Canon EOS 5D Mark III, Canon EF600mm F4L IS II USM lens with 2x III teleconverter, focal length 1200mm, f/11 at 1/750 second, evaluative metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 1600.

Facing Page Top: Wood duck. Canon EOS 5D Mark III, Canon EF600mm F4L IS II USM lens with 2x III teleconverter, focal length 1200mm, f/8 at 1/8000 second, evaluative metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 2000.

Facing Page Bottom: Green heron. Canon EOS 5D Mark III, Canon EF600mm F4L IS II USM lens with 1.4x III teleconverter, focal length 840mm, f/11 at 1/3000 second, evaluative metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 4000.





caldron during spawning season, muskrats zooming around, and, at the edges of the woods, occasional tiger swallowtail butterflies.

North Bay Park is a magical place near downtown Ypsilanti, Michigan. Take Exit 183 South off of I-94, and be sure to bring a camera. NP



Mallard ducks, North Bay Park near downtown Ypsilanti, Michigan, by Bob Feldman.

Left: Canon EOS 5D Mark III, Canon EF600mm F4L IS II USM lens with 2x III teleconverter, focal length 1200mm, f/11 at 1/1500 second, evaluative metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 1600.

Below: Canon EOS 5D Mark III, Canon EF100-400mm F4.5-5.6L IS II USM lens, focal length 330mm, f/8 at 1/2000 second, evaluative metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 2000.



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# TEXTURES, SHAPES & COLORS!

Article and Photography by Stan Ford, Field Contributor

I used to think of items on a bucket list as one-and-done—check it off and move on. That was before I experienced Lower Antelope Canyon. It just cannot be fully appreciated in one visit. Nearly every Top 10 list of incredible locations to photograph or visit includes Antelope Canyon. When I first saw images of the canyon, it immediately went to the top of my list. And now, after several visits, it not only remains on my list, it stays near the top. I recommend seeing both upper and lower canyons, but, for photography, the lower canyon offers so much more (in my humble opinion).



Lower Antelope Canyon, located on Navajo land east of Page, Arizona, by Stan Ford.  
Above: The Confluence. Nikon D800E, Zeiss Distagon T\* F2.8 15mm ZF.2 lens, focal length 15mm, f/8 at 0.5 second, matrix metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 100.  
Facing Page: Whale's Nose. Nikon D800E, Nikkor 24-70mm F2.8 lens, focal length 62mm, f/8 at 1/30 second, matrix metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 100.





Each visit is like going to Hawaii or Walt Disney World for the first time. I see new shapes, patterns, textures, colors and more, and I learn of a new named formation: The Chief, Rocky Mountain Sunset, Lady in the Wind. Since I always leave a few shots behind, I start planning my next visit as I walk out.

Antelope Canyon is very accessible and easy to get to. Pre-trip research is almost a must, and there's plenty of available information about photography in the canyon. The challenge is determining which recommendations are accurate or beneficial. In preparing for my first trip, I read several articles by "experts" who all claimed their advice was definitive—all of which proved to be wrong. Fortunately, I happened to see Charlie Cramer (Ansel Adams Gallery instructor) between my visits to the upper and lower part of the canyon. His insight proved invaluable and made the difference between coming home with a few good images and coming home with a hundred very good images.

The images that got me interested in visiting the canyon were shafts of light (sunbeams) and textures of the walls. The colors of the walls were impressive, but the textures just appealed to me. The light beams felt like one of those iconic shots we all want.

I can't comment on the walking tours, having only visited the canyon while on a photo tour, but a photo tour doesn't give you or your group exclusive access, as multiple companies offer photo tours. In general, April-October are the only months to photograph light beams (mid-morning is the best). My most successful visits have been in May. The summer months have better light, but also mean a lot of walking tours—where people may walk through your shot, get in the way, or stir up a lot of dust. It gets more fun when tour busses of foreign tourists arrive. Patience!

Since photo and walking tours occur at the same time, I recommend looking up and shooting high. We have a tendency to look straight ahead at our subject, but the lower canyon is below grade, which means most of the walls are well above your head. Shooting up eliminates the tourists who may walk in front of you.

On my first visit, I asked the guide what equipment I should bring. She said; "bring everything," which was a very bad recommendation—too many people, and too much dust to change a lens or even set down my bag. I recommend one camera body with one lens and a sturdy tripod. Make sure your battery is charged; or bring a second one, especially in the upper canyon. Also bring water. It can get a little warm in Arizona.

Now that I have been to canyon several times I am less like a kid in a Disney theme park. I was already excited when I descended into the canyon the first time. The colors and textures overwhelmed my senses. I was so focused on the textures and colors of the walls I was unsuccessful in focusing my camera. Although it was hard to decide exactly what shape or texture to capture, it was actually the auto-focus of my lens struggling in the dim light. This convinced me to use only my manual focus lenses (Zeiss 15mm and 25mm) on future trips. It makes a big difference not having to worry about focusing, and being able to concentrate solely on subject and composition. I use my 24-70 and 70-200 Nikkor lenses when visiting from November through March, as there's no problem with auto-focus, mostly due to the sun not being directly overhead. The light is even, with very little contrast.

Be sure to communicate with the tour guide. Tell them the type of images you want to capture. They should know where specific formations, good shapes, etc. are located. Most speak our language and can help with ISO, aperture, etc.

It's important to decide what you want. You can try to get a few images of each of the named formations, shapes, textures, and colors, or just concentrate on one or two. My first visit yielded three to four good images of each of the colors, textures, formations, and shapes. On subsequent visits I came home with 15 to 20 very nice images of each shape, color, or texture (about 50 keepers).

An important tip—no chimping! There's no time, and it's difficult to see the LCD. Check the histogram and focus of the image, then be wowed by your images when you get back to your hotel or home.

As a result of my photography of the canyon, having shot there on numerous occasions, I now consider myself experienced enough to share my recommendations and observations, as well as the basic differences between the upper and lower canyons.

---

Three beams, Lower Antelope Canyon, located on Navajo land east of Page, Arizona, by Stan Ford. Nikon D800E, Nikkor 24-70mm F2.8 lens, focal length 48mm, f/8 at 1/4 second, matrix metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 100.



Lower Antelope Canyon, located on Navajo land east of Page, Arizona, by Stan Ford.  
Above: Lady in the Wind. Nikon D800E, Nikkor 24-70mm F2.8 lens, focal length 31mm, f/8 at 1/20 second, matrix metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 100.  
Below: Sunset. Nikon D800E, Zeiss Distagon T\* F2.8 15mm ZF.2 lens, focal length 15mm, f/8 at 0.3 second, matrix metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 100.



Shapes, Lower Antelope Canyon, located on Navajo land east of Page, Arizona, by Stan Ford. Nikon D800E, Nikkor 24-70mm F2.8 lens, focal length 48mm, f/8 at 0.3 second, matrix metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 100.

Upper:

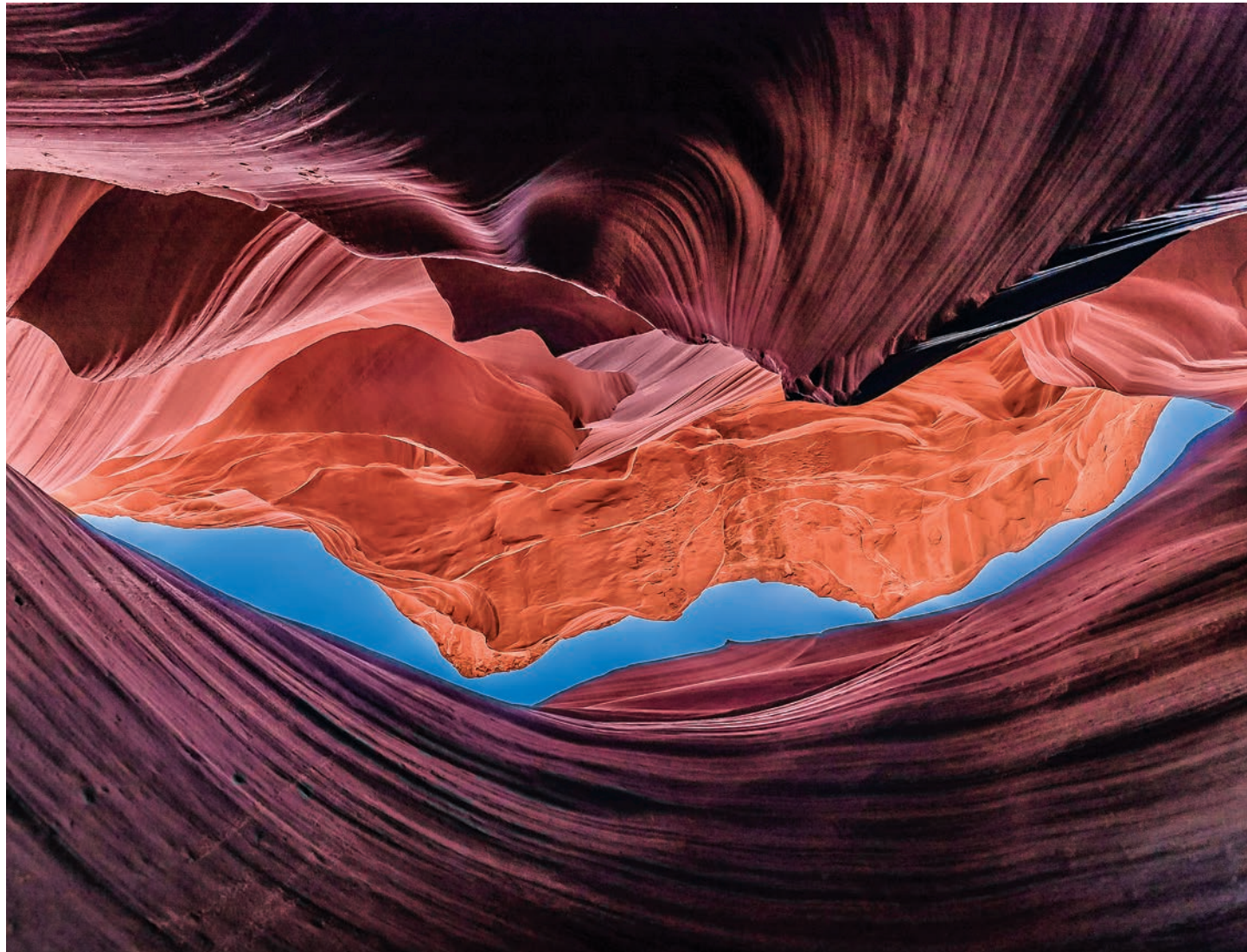
1. Larger (more people can fit in it at one time).
2. Above ground (no need to descend stairs).
3. Darker (typical exposure will be around 20-30 sec. at native ISO).
4. Many tour companies (lots of people). No obvious coordination.
5. Less photogenic (IMHO).

Lower:

1. Narrow (very tight in places). Fewer people.
2. Below grade (not easily accessible for some).
3. Better light (exposure is more typically 1/5 second to 1/6 second at native ISO).
4. Only two tour companies (operated by brother and sister) have access to this canyon. I strongly recommend the brother's company.
5. Much, much more interesting for photographers.

I've visited a few other slot canyons on a tour offered by a company specializing in photo tours of Upper Antelope and the other canyons. I was very disappointed. If I never visit another canyon, Lower Antelope is everything I could hope for as a nature photographer.

This place is amazing and too much fun, which is why I return at least once each year. Enjoy! NP



Sky View, Lower Antelope Canyon, located on Navajo land east of Page, Arizona, by Stan Ford. Nikon D800E, Zeiss Distagon T\* F2.8 15mm ZF.2 lens, focal length 15mm, f/8 at 1/180 second, matrix metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 100.

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FEB. 11 - 17, 2018

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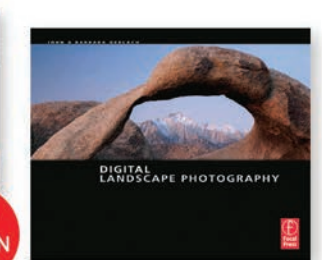
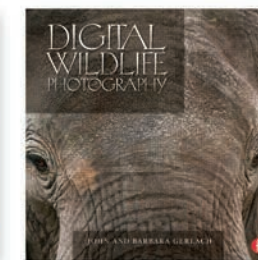
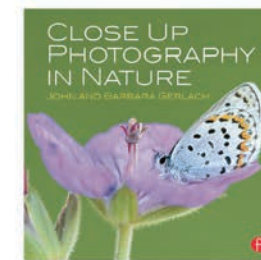
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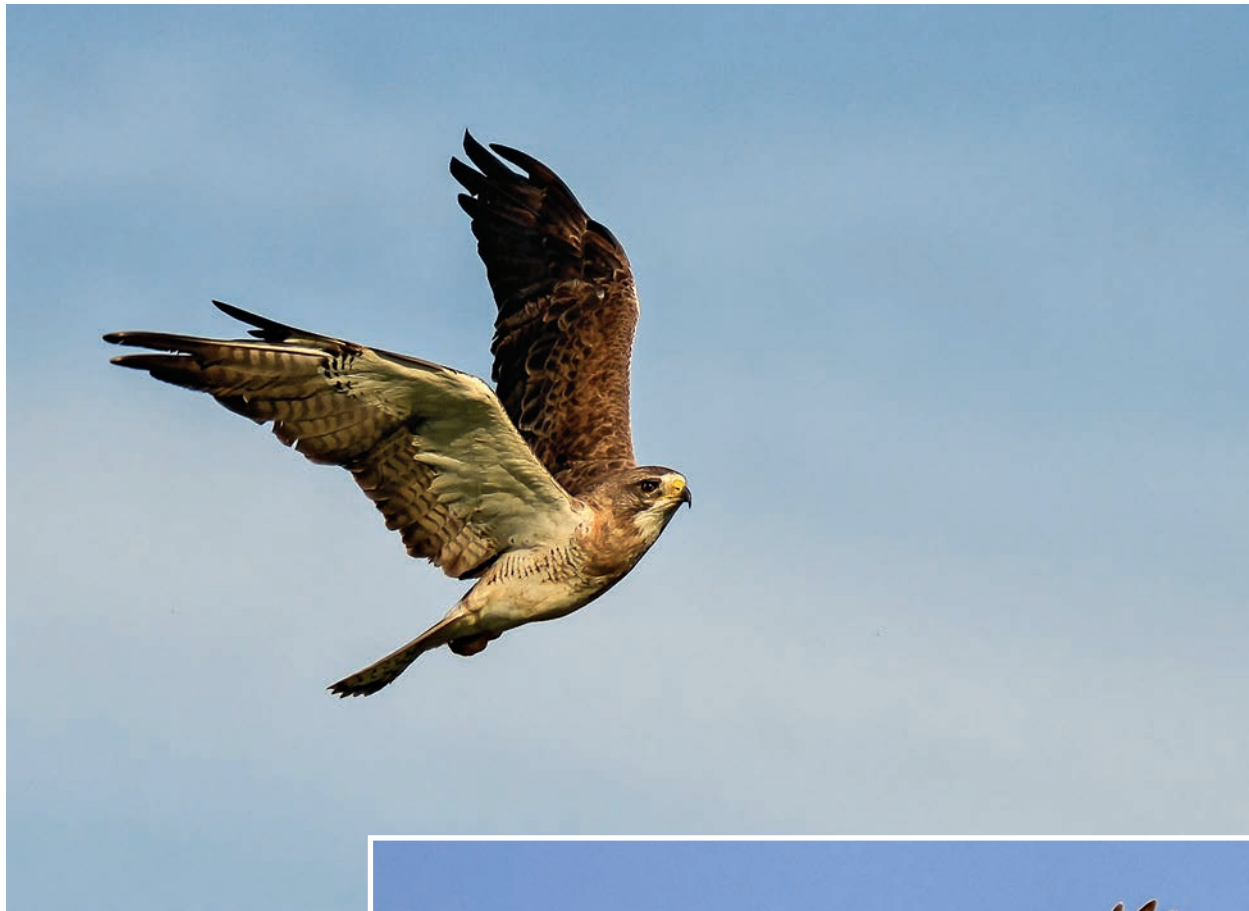
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# RAPTORS OF THE NORTHERN PLAINS

Article and Photography by Stephen McDonough, Field Contributor

Images by Stephen McDonough.

Above Top: Swainson's hawk. Nikon D4, Nikkor 70-200mm F2.8 lens with teleconverter, focal length 400mm, f/6.3 at 1/5000 second, matrix metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 800.

Above Bottom: American kestrel. Nikon D4, Nikkor 200-500mm F5.6 lens, focal length 500mm, f/5.6 at 1/5000 second, matrix metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 800.

Facing Page: Rough-legged hawk. Nikon D3, Nikkor 200-500mm F5.6 lens, focal length 500mm, f/5.6 at 1/5000 second, matrix metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 800.

**T**he northern plains include the five states of North and South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming and Nebraska along with two Canadian provinces: Alberta and Saskatchewan. Before the arrival of Europeans and Americans, the amount of wildlife found in the northern plains short grassland prairie rivaled the African savanna.

The combined area of the five states is 470,000 square miles, considerably more than the state of Texas (268,000 square miles). However, only 4.8 million people live in these five states compared to 25 million in Texas. The rural nature of the northern plains means lots of wide open spaces, many gravel roads, and open views. Photography, however, can be

a challenge with sparsely scattered animals. Hunting pressure makes birds and mammals somewhat skittish although significant state and federal nature preserves allow for some excellent habitat. North Dakota has 33 federal wildlife refuges, the most of any state.

North and South Dakota, parts of Montana, and significant portions of Alberta and Saskatchewan also are contained in the prairie pothole region, remnants of the last glaciation 10,000 years ago. The thousands of shallow wetlands known as potholes support 50 percent of duck reproduction in North America and provide a travel corridor for 50 percent of migrating waterfowl.

In 1996, Kidder County, just east of Bismarck, was listed number eight on the top 50 birding hot spots in North America by a birding magazine. Four hundred bird species have been seen in North Dakota.

The extensive prairie, refuges, and potholes present plenty of food for raptors, birds that feed on other animals. Raptors have excellent eyesight, strong claws for holding food, and also a strong, curved beak for tearing their prey.

In late winter and early spring, snowy owls and rough-legged hawks move from Canada into North Dakota to join great horned owls in hunting. Bald eagles make their appearance in March and wait on frozen lakes for the thaw and emergence of fish that died during the winter. Red-tailed hawks arrive in late March followed by sharp-shinned, broad-winged, ferruginous, and Swainson's hawks, northern harriers, and American kestrels.

**OWLS**

The great horned owl is one raptor tough enough to live in North Dakota throughout the year. Its cousin the snowy owl actually lives most of the year in northern Canada. Occasional mass migrations of snowy owls occur into the United States as the birds follow their food supply south.

The great horned owl has a huge range through North America, Central America, and South America. This raptor has been difficult for me to photograph in flight with a lot of photos taken of the owl's backside. The great horned owl is the earliest nesting raptor in the northern plains region, often laying eggs during winter. Their wingspan can be up to 60 inches and they can weigh up to five and a half pounds, with females somewhat larger than males. Great horned owls are monogamous and territorial and may stay in their preferred area their entire lives. Their forest habitat and nocturnal nature make photography challenging.

The snowy owl is relatively easy to spot during the day on power poles waiting to prey on small mammals. Getting photographs away from man-made structures is sometimes challenging. They can be less spooky than other raptors when observed from a car. Female snowy owls are slightly larger than males and speckled with black feathers while the males are nearly entirely white. They breed in the Arctic and winter in southern Canada and northern states. Snowy owls are the largest owls in North America with wingspans up to 59 inches and weigh up to six and a half pounds.

The burrowing owl, like the snowy owl, is diurnal and can be seen during the day. This small owl measures less than one foot long with a two foot wingspan and weighs five to eight ounces, about the size of an American robin. Burrowing owls may adopt an abandoned prairie dog burrow or badger den or build their own. Their breeding summer range extends into southern Canada and they winter in southern states and Central America. Burrowing owls are known to collect animal

dung and place it in their burrow. They then eat beetles and other insects attracted to the dung.

**BALD EAGLE**

The American bald eagle is the national symbol of the United States and a sacred bird to many Native American tribes. Over-hunting and widespread use of DDT resulted in catastrophic losses of bald eagles with only 412 nesting pairs identified in the 48 contiguous states in the 1950s. The bald and golden eagle protection act of 1940 began the process of recovery and DDT was banned in 1972.

Their length averages 31 inches, their wingspans are 80 inches and they weigh nine and a half pounds with large eagles weighing up to nearly 14 pounds.

Bald eagles live year round in Alaska, western Canada, the northern west coast, and northern Rockies. Much of Canada and several northern states provide summer breeding habitat. Bald eagles winter in nwestern, southern, and northeastern states. Most bald eagles head north through North Dakota into Canada although some will nest here along the Missouri River or near large lakes. If the Missouri River has open water during mild winters, some bald eagles will stay in North Dakota during the winter.

The bald eagle is a fish eagle and therefore prefers lake and river habitat with nearby forest for perching and nesting. Bald eagle nests are huge and can weigh nearly two tons!

American bald eagles arrive early in North Dakota each spring. Over 60 bald eagles can easily be seen in a several hour drive from Bismarck. Resting on partially frozen lakes, the bald eagles feast on fish that died during the winter.

**RED-TAILED HAWKS**

The red-tailed hawk is a common and widespread hawk. This hawk has a great variety of appearances and differs with geography. There are five races of red-tails: western, eastern, Fuertes, Florida, and Harlan's. Western red-tails are found in the Pacific Northwest and the Eastern race extends to the northern Great Plains.

The red-tailed hawk is frequently seen during the summer in the northern plains. This hawk's breeding range is largely in Canada but also includes Alaska, North and South Dakota, Minnesota, Montana, and parts of New England and the eastern United States. They winter in most of the United States except the northern plains states. Commonly called a chicken hawk, the red-tailed hawk usually eats small mammals but also will attack birds and snakes. You are most likely to see the red-tail on power line posts, hay bales, or occasionally on fence posts. I have seen the hawk watch intently then pounce to the ground and come up with an unfortunate mouse.

The estimated population of red-tails in the United States is one million. They are monogamous and will often return to the same breeding area year after year. Sexual maturity occurs at two years of age. Males will attempt a courtship flight display with females before mating.

Many falconers have red-tailed hawks as their hunting companions due to the intelligent, social, and healthy nature of these hawks.

In flight one of the best identifying features is the dark marks on the front underwing. Adults show a red tail and juveniles have two-toned upper wings. Their length averages 19 inches with a wingspan of 49 inches and weight of two and a half pounds. Large red-tails can weigh up to three and one-third pounds.

Images by Stephen McDonough.

Right: Bald eagle. Nikon D4, Nikkor 70-200mm F2.8 lens, f/5.6 at 1/5000 second, matrix metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 800.

Below: Red-tailed hawk. Nikon D4, Nikkor 200-500mm F5.6 lens, focal length 380mm, f/5.6 at 1/2000 second, matrix metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 800.



The Krider's version is a white morph of the eastern red-tail hawk with a nearly all white head and underparts. Red-tails can initiate flight with a leap provided by very strong legs.

**SWAINSON'S HAWK**

Swainson's hawks have one of the longest migrations of any raptor and will travel from their wintering range in Argentina all the way to their nesting areas in the northern plains and southern Canada. This round trip can amount to 6000 miles. Three age groups are seen: adult, one-year old, and juvenile. Females are larger than males. Their color varies from light-morph, rufous-morph, to dark-morph. The Swainson's hawk is one of the largest buteo hawks in the northern plains region. They breed on open areas and prairies of western states from Texas to North Dakota and over to California and other western states.

Their length averages 19 inches with a wingspan of 51 inches and they weigh nearly two pounds although some Swainson's will weigh nearly three pounds.

Key recognition features seen on the classic adult are the red bib on the upper chest with the unmarked white belly and a two-toned underwing with a pale wing front. A white throat patch may also be seen. The rufous morph has a rufous belly and red markings on the pale front underwing. The dark morph has all dark body and underwings.

**FERRUGINOUS HAWK**

Ferruginous hawks have a much shorter migration than broad-winged and Swainson's hawks. Ferruginous hawks winter in the southern United States and Central America.

Their length averages 23 inches, wingspan 56 inches, and they weigh three and a half pounds although some Ferruginous weight up to four and a half pounds.

Key recognition features are long tapered wings with dark wing tips, dark feathered legs, and dark eye-line in light morphs. In flight, the dark legs appear to form a "V" on the belly while the white wings have black wingtips. The tail is not banded.

Ferruginous hawks are not regularly found in North Dakota compared to the more common red-tailed and Swainson's hawks and the northern harrier. Ferruginous hawks are most frequently seen in southwestern states. Numbers have recovered from hunting and habitat loss and their conservation status was moved from Near Threatened to Least Concern status in 2008.

**ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK**

The rough-legged hawk can be seen in southern Canada and northern states during the winter months as they migrate south from their summer arctic breeding grounds. This is a substantial hawk with females larger than males. Feathers cover the legs to provide insulation in the hawk's cold range. Six plumage types are seen: adult male, female, and juvenile of either dark or light morphs.

Their length averages 21 inches, with a wingspan of 53 inches, and they weigh just over two pounds with large rough-legged hawks weighing three pounds.

The rough-legged hawk has a distinctive wing pattern of dark carpal patches on the underwings and tail feathers with a white edge, followed by a dark band and narrow bands of white and dark. Rough-legged hawks can hover for a short period of time, like some other buteo hawks. The American kestrel, however, excels in hovering.

**COOPER'S HAWK**

The Cooper's hawk is a small forest hawk well adapted to navigating flight among trees, making flight photography somewhat difficult.

Their underwings are characterized by alternating white and dark bands. The rounded tail feathers show four to five dark bands, a helpful distinguishing identification pattern. Their length averages 15 inches for males and 18 inches for females, wingspans are 29 inches for males and 33 inches for females, and the males weigh 12 ounces and the females weigh 19 ounces with large females weighing 24 ounces. The sharp-tailed hawk is similar in appearance but significantly smaller.

Cooper's hawks can be found year round in most of the United States except northern and northeastern states. Migrating hawks will breed in northern states and Canada and then return to winter in southern states and Central America. They sometimes hang out by bird feeders, even in northern states during the winter, to prey on song birds.

**BROAD-WINGED HAWK**

Broad-winged hawks are not commonly seen in North Dakota. Their summer breeding range is in the eastern United States and central Canada. Their winter range is in southern Florida and in Central and South America. Broad-winged hawks average 4350 miles in their annual migration, traveling nearly 70 miles a day. They prefer forest habitat and prey on small mammals, amphibians, and insects by swooping down from low perches in trees. Their length averages 15 inches with a wingspan of 34 inches and their weight averages 14 ounces with large broad-winged hawks weighing up to 17 ounces.

**AMERICAN KESTREL**

The American Kestrel is common and widespread in North America. The kestrel is the smallest falcon in the United States. Females are slightly larger than males. Males have a rufous tail with a prominent dark band near the end tail, and have blue-gray wings contrasting with otherwise reddish dorsal plumage. Females have a reddish brown tail with numerous dark steaks, and have consistently reddish wings and dorsal color. Both have a gorgeous face with prominent mustache marks on a white face. Their length averages nine inches with a wingspan of 22 inches and they weigh four ounces with large kestrels up to five ounces.

Kestrels are found year round in much of the United States and in Central and South America. Migrating American kestrels will breed in northern states and Canada then winter in central and southern states and Central America.

**NORTHERN HARRIER**

Northern harriers can be recognized from a distance by their flight pattern, low to the ground and following contours of the land. Males have largely white underwings, black wing tips and a dark gray head giving a hooded look. Females have a dark brown head, brown streaked chest and multiple lines on the underwings. Juveniles look like females except with more of a rufous coloration. Northern harrier females average 19 inches in length with a 46 inch wingspan and they weigh 18 ounces. Males are considerably smaller and weight on average 12 ounces.

Northern Harriers prefer prairie grasslands and sloughs. They nest on the ground and, in my experience, do not perch frequently on posts or power lines.



Images by Stephen McDonough.

Left: Ferruginous hawk. Nikon D4, Nikkor 70-200mm F2.8 lens, f/5.6 at 1/5000 second, matrix metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 800.

Below: Cooper's hawk. Nikon D4, Nikkor 70-200mm F2.8 lens, f/5.6 at 1/2000 second, matrix metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 800.





They breed in Canada and in the United States northern, central, and western states, and winter in western states, Central America, and northern South America.

**PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS IN THE NORTHERN PLAINS**

I am out looking for wildlife nearly every day of the year. Each time is different and most of the time, no remarkable photos are obtained. Every now and then, however, a spectacular day occurs with excellent photos of multiple species. Driving gravel roads means less traffic and driving slower which then allows for scanning posts and trees for birds. The location of the sun to perched birds is critical in obtaining photos, along with wind speed and direction for anticipating which direction the raptors will fly. Many birds lift their tail feathers and defecate just before flying so the photographer can anticipate take off.

Hiking in sloughs with tree rows can result in a raptor flying overhead, unaware of your presence and improving your

opportunities for photography. Getting out of the car and walking will increase your alertness, contribute to your health, and lead to unanticipated photographs.

I usually photograph with manual settings, ISO of 400-800 on sunny days and ISO 2000 on overcast days. I like the shutter speed to be 1/2000 of a second or faster to capture birds in flight. When gradually approaching a perched bird, I preset the settings and concentrate on the rapid focus needed to lock in on the bird.

**CONCLUSION**

The northern plains for many are fly over states, only seen from a plane at 30,000 feet when traveling east to west or west to east. For those of us who like wide open spaces, few people, varied wildlife, and wonderful opportunities for photography, the northern plains states are great places to live or visit. Raptors are impressive birds, beautiful and majestic, soaring over the plains and prairies. NP



Great horned owl, by Stephen McDonough. Nikon D4, Nikkor 200-500mm F5.6 lens, focal length 500mm, f/5.6 at 1/1600 second, matrix metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 2000.

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# EAGLES IN THE “BURBS”

Article and Photography by Jim Booth, Field Contributor

As a realtor in the Greater Nashville area, I cover a lot of ground in the surrounding counties and usually have my camera gear with me. After all you never know what you might come across.

One day about seven years ago, I was heading into the country from the suburbs. Just as I was starting to get into the countryside, a very large bird carrying a five-foot-long twig crossed right in front of my windshield. I thought to myself, “WOW, that sure looked like an eagle!”

I quickly found a place to pull over, and I grabbed my big lens. Sure enough, it was a bald eagle. I followed it to a nest in a stand of trees in the middle of a cornfield. This was late fall and I kept passing by this spot for five years in hopes of getting some nice photos of the pair. However, I could never get close enough without spooking them. Plus, there was not a clear shot of the nest, because there were many branches in the way.

Two years ago I drove by to check out the nest and it looked as though it was abandoned. Had something happened to the eagles that had previously occupied the nest? As I surveyed the area I noticed another nest about 300 yards away. There were the eagles in a new home, and their new nest was on the rear of someone’s property!

To make a long story short, I used my realtor credentials to meet the owner of that property. Fortunately I was granted much closer access to the nest with a better elevation for viewing.

These photos were taken in April 2016 at a distance of about 100-150 yards using a Canon 5D Mark III and a Canon 600mm F4 lens with 1.4x teleconverter for an effective 840mm reach.

In my continued travels in the Nashville area, I have spotted several bald eagles in the “burbs” which shows the amazing adaptability of our country’s national bird. These remarkable creatures that mate for life are a true inspiration to us with their beauty and majesty as well as their ability to live alongside of us. I hope we can be as inspiring to others as this beautiful bird inspires us.

NP



Eagles in Tennessee, by Jim Booth.

Above: Canon EOS 5D Mark III, Canon EF600mm F4L IS II USM lens with 1.4x III teleconverter, focal length 840mm, f/5.6 at 1/200 second, evaluative metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 400.

Facing Page Top: Canon EOS 5D Mark III, Canon EF600mm F4L IS II USM lens with 1.4x III teleconverter, focal length 840mm, f/8 at 1/3000 second, evaluative metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 500.

Facing Page Bottom: Canon EOS 5D Mark III, Canon EF600mm F4L IS II USM lens with 1.4x III teleconverter, focal length 840mm, f/5.6 at 1/200 second, evaluative metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 400.



# A GALAPAGOS PRIMER

Article by Joe McDonald, Editor

Photography by Joe and Mary Ann McDonald, Editors

Joe's and Mary Ann's web site: <http://hoothollow.com/index.html> (Click for Live Link)



For nature lovers and wildlife photographers I'd wager that the Galapagos Islands would be in the top ten destinations on anyone's bucket list. Back in the old days, meaning film, I made several trips to what are truly the enchanted islands, but in the current era of digital I neglected this destination. Reports of overregulation and overcrowding, with too many tourists hustled through landing sites, discouraged me from making another visit. Last year, however, I visited the islands after a gap of nearly twenty years, and now I can't wait to return. There are many reasons!

The rough history of the Galapagos Islands is familiar to most nature enthusiasts. Although the islands were discov-

ered in the mid-1500s, and used as a supply base for whalers in the early 1800s, for a very long time the archipelago was just one of many dots on a world map to nearly everyone else. Whalers visited the islands for several reasons. Sperm whales plied the surrounding seas, and fresh water for restocking casks was available on some of the islands. Just as important were the thousands of giant tortoises that inhabited the various islands. Tortoises, kept upside down in the hulls of ships, could survive in this deplorable state for months, thus providing a fresh source of meat for protein-starved sailors. The archipelago's notoriety grew after Charles Darwin visited the islands, and with the publication of *The Origin of Species*



Galapagos Islands, by Joe McDonald.

Above: Nazca booby, Genovesa Island. Canon 1D Mark IV, Canon 16-35mm F2.8 L IS USM lens, focal length 16mm, f/5 at 1/2500 second, spot metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 800.

Facing Page: Galapagos tortoise, Santa Cruz Island. Canon 1D X, Canon 24-105mm F4 L IS USM lens, focal length 35mm, f/30 at 1/13 second, spot metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 1600.



Land iguana, South Plaza Island, Galapagos Islands, by Joe McDonald. Canon 1D X, Canon 16-35mm F2.8 L IS USM lens, focal length 16mm, f/16 at 1/1000 second, spot metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 1600.



Above: Galapagos hawk, Española Island, Galapagos Islands, by Mary Ann McDonald. Canon 1D X, Canon 100-400mm F4.5-5.6 L IS USM lens, focal length 227mm, f/7.2 at 1/1600 second, spot metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 800.



Right: Red-billed tropicbird, Genovesa Island, Galapagos Islands, by Joe McDonald. Canon 1D X, Canon 100-400mm F4.5-5.6 L IS USM lens, focal length 400mm, f/5.6 at 1/4000 second, spot metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 800.



Galapagos Islands, by Joe McDonald.

Left: Green sea turtle, Floreana Island. Olympus TG4 digital camera, equivalent focal length in 35mm: 25mm, f/2.8 at 1/400 second, auto exposure mode, ISO 100.

Don't let anyone tell you turtles are slow! I worked hard to swim ahead of this sea turtle, which would then sail on by with slow leisurely strokes of its wing-like flippers, seeming to fly underwater. JMcD

Below: Galapagos sea lion, Floreana Island. Olympus TG4 digital camera, equivalent focal length in 35mm: 25mm, f/2.8 at 1/400 second, auto exposure mode, ISO 100.

One of the true joys experienced in the Galapagos is swimming with friendly and curious Galapagos sea lions. While they are at most snorkeling sites, they move fast, and it is a challenge to frame one and catch a shot! JMcD



its place as a natural history icon was cemented. In 1959 Ecuador declared the islands a national park, and the tourism industry began. Today, nearly a quarter million people visit the islands each year, almost a three-fold increase from the last time I had visited the islands.

As it turned out, overcrowding wasn't a problem. True, at a few popular sites there were other groups present, but we dealt with that by simply stepping aside and letting the tourists pass by. Photographers, of course, generally progress much more slowly, and with an understanding Galapagos guide, the presence of faster-moving tourist groups did not interfere with our experience.

All Galapagos landings are accompanied by a licensed Galapagos guide, and from what I observed that guide may be the key to a productive trip. I saw some guides who commandeered their groups, hustling their charges along like sheep, barking at them to stay on a trail or to keep up with the group. Mind you, people do have to stay on the established trails, but racing along one to complete a visit is not productive. Some trails pass through wildlife-rich locations and peter out into a hot and tedious endurance hike through scrub forest with little to offer for a photographer, but some guides may insist upon completing a trek. Establishing a good rapport with a guide is important, and the fact that we did so probably made our trip so rewarding.

Located on the equator about 600 miles off the coast of South America, the archipelago is composed of twenty-one different islands. Some have no visitor access, while other islands, or more correctly, landing sites, are visited by nearly everyone. It is impossible to visit all the landing sites in one trip. Most tours last one week, and either visit the northern or the southern sites. Two of the most interesting islands are at the two extremes, with Genovesa (aka Tower) lying in the far northeast, and Española (aka Hood) in the far southeast. You can't visit both on a typical one-week-long itinerary. Another great locale, the primordial, volcanic landscape of Fernandina (aka Narborough) lies in the far west, and is generally visited only on tours lasting about two weeks. For my money, that is the only way to go, as you can get to Genovesa, Española, Fernandina, and many of the other major sites on a two-week-long trip. There is too much to see, with too much diversity possible, to do this amazing place justice in just one week.

There is one regulation that has put off, and certainly has perplexed, many photographers. You cannot use flash. For some unknown reason, in this incredibly bright location, with an equatorial sun beating down upon reflective lava rock or white sand beaches, a microsecond of fill-in flash is not allowed. Frankly, I cannot understand the reason why that is prohibited, nor have I heard one given. Ironically, if you peruse the most popular wildlife books offered on the island, some made by world-famous Galapagos photographers, you will note that some of the most striking images were made with full or fill-in flash. When were those images made? Before, or after, this regulation was instituted?

That said, this limitation wasn't as annoying as I expected it to be. If you shoot RAW images, adjusting the Shadows slider usually negates obnoxious contrast so there is a work-around. As you will see in this portfolio, not using flash did not affect our making productive images.

While there is plenty to see and photograph on the islands, there are several exciting subjects underwater as well. The Galapagos is a popular scuba diving destination, but anyone who can snorkel, or who is willing to learn, will

have just as much fun, and it is the best way to maximize your time (or to have virtually no free time!) on a visit. Most on-shore landings occur in the early morning and the late afternoon, leaving the midday free, creating the perfect break for a snorkel journey along the shoreline. Mary and I had our most enjoyable experiences on the entire trip swimming along with green sea turtles or trying to frame up shots of Galapagos sea lions dashing and swirling all around us. Having the opportunity to swim next to a paddling Galapagos penguin, the world's northernmost penguin species, is a real thrill, too. Since we rarely have any chances to photograph underwater anywhere else we go, we don't own special housings or expensive underwater cameras. We just used GoPros and Olympus TG4 point-and-shoot cameras for our underwater work. I especially liked the Olympus since I could use its big LCD screen to frame shots, even when I had the camera positioned several feet below me via a cheap monopod.

Just like one of our other favorite destinations, the Falkland Islands, a super telephoto isn't necessary here. Back in the film days I used a 500mm for some of my shots but today, with digital and the cropping possibilities this provides if necessary, we're fine with a 100-400mm zoom. Granted, sometimes diving pelicans and boobies were further away than I would have liked, but for the compositional freedom and the ease of use, and transport, we were fine with our zooms. I would recommend that zoom range for everyone unless you have a very, very special need.

Picking an initial selection of images for this portfolio, I noted that 11 of 51 images were shot at 45mm or less, 17 between 70-300mm, and 23 between 301-400mm. In Mary's 101 favorite shots from the entire trip, 56 of 101 images were made between 301-400mm, 17 between 70-300mm, and 23 images at 69mm or less, with the few remainders being GoPro jpgs. Some of our 400mm images are cropped, suggesting that a longer lens could have been handy, but I wonder if we would have had the same success, in terms of focus sharpness or framing, had we used longer lenses. As it is, the cropped images work just fine!

Choosing the time of year to visit depends a bit on what you wish to see, as well as your schedule. Since the islands are smack on the equator, the temperatures do not vary much but the rainfall may. In late summer a misty rain known as the garua cools the air and softens the light, and the endemic, and beautiful, waved albatrosses are well into their nesting season. We prefer the spring, when albatrosses are courting and the boobies and frigatebirds are either courting or sitting on eggs. Truly, though, any time is fine.

Depending upon how you go, whether you are a part of a big boat with 50 or more passengers (gag!) or a smaller boat on a true photo tour, you may have no choice on the itinerary. That is where your photo tour leader's expertise should come into play, working with the charter boat beforehand so that you are visiting the best islands.

My favorites include the islands I mentioned earlier, Genovesa, Española, and Fernandina. Genovesa is the booby island, where all three of the Galapagos species are present, and where the Nazca booby (formerly called the masked booby) nests along the trail. Several times I regretted not having a DSLR with a flip out LCD, which would have enabled me to easily frame a ground-level view of a trailside nesting Nazca booby. Next trip, I'll have one, as there are plenty of opportunities for low-perspective shooting. Here, too, red-footed boobies, sporting broad pinkish-red webbed feet, improbably balance on tree limbs and make their sloppy stick

nests, while blue-footed boobies soar overhead. Patrolling the blue skies, great frigatebirds, stiletto-thin black pirates, chase after boobies, terns, and the delicate red-billed tropicbirds in flight, harassing them until they drop their catch. Frigatebirds are remarkably agile, and often catch a desperately ditched fish before it hits the sea.

At the far end of the trail that began with a cliff-side climb up the narrow chute known as Prince Phillip's Steps thousands, and I mean thousands, of Galapagos petrels swirl across the horizon in a dizzying display. The birds nest in holes and crevices that appear invisible to the naked eye until you watch, quite carefully, as a darting and dipping petrel suddenly lands and, seconds later, disappears into a crack. Trying to catch one of these birds in flight, or the instant it lands is quite the challenge. Short-eared owls lurk on ledges in the many crevices crisscrossing the lava fields, leaving their roosts at dusk to pick off petrels.

To me, no trip to the Galapagos would be complete without a visit to Española. This is the home of the endemic waved albatross, the only place in the world where this bird nests. These big beautiful birds nest right beside the trail, and if you are there at the right time you will be treated to their amusing (to us) courtship display. Two birds will approach each other face-on, their triangular-shaped heads swaying back and forth, before raising their beaks and trumpeting, with a call that reminded me of a king penguin's cry. The birds might pause for a moment, first gaping their bills widely, then clattering them together like noisy castanets in an avian sword fight. Neighboring albatrosses might waddle towards the cliff edge before spreading their wings and, in a web foot slapping run, hurdle themselves over the cliff and into a long soaring flight. This species gets its name from the thin vermiculation in the feathers, a series of delicate wavy lines extending from their breast through their belly.

Española also has the most colorful marine iguanas, the only sea-going lizard. Although marine iguanas are found on many different Galapagos Islands, on most they are a rather uninteresting solid black, their color only relieved at times by gray patches of partially shed skin and a crusty, lumpy gray-white head and snout. On Española, however, the iguanas are more colorful, with basking lizards brightened by patches of pink and red. Unlike their ancestral relatives, the green tree iguanas of mainland South America, marine iguanas are dark colored and for a reason. These lizards feed upon algae growing at or below the tide line, requiring them to be in or under the cold water as they graze. Although the Galapagos is equatorial, the water surrounding the islands is cold, located as it is at the back end of the Humboldt Current that originated in the far southwestern coast of South America. Black pigment absorbs light, and a cold, black-colored Iguana just emerging from the sea will heat up faster than it would if it were light colored.

On several other islands there's another species, the land iguana. This is a terrestrial lizard, feeding on the flowers and pads of opuntia cactus—giant prickly pears, and the flowers and leaves of ground-dwelling vegetation when present. Unlike their marine relatives that truly do resemble dragons, the land iguana appears more lizard-like. They are common on South Plaza Island, and particularly colorful on Santa Cruz.

Ironically, two of the most famous denizens of the islands are either unremarkable or hard to find. I'm talking about Darwin's finches and the giant tortoises. The finches, which are actually divergent descendants of a tanager, get much of the credit for inspiring Darwin's theory, but Darwin him-

self didn't take much notice of their significance at the time. He rather sloppily failed to identify which island his various specimens came from.

Darwin's finches are found everywhere and are like house sparrows in the town of Puerto Ayora, the home of the Darwin Research Center on Santa Cruz. Most of the finches look very similar, with sometimes only subtle differences in the length or thickness of the bill, and most are clad in an unpretentious dull brown or black plumage. The insect-eating warbler finch is the exception, as it is light gray in color and sports a thin, warbler-like bill. I have found it often sharing habitat with a truly bright spot of color here, the yellow warbler that forages in brush and mangroves lining many island beaches.

Santa Cruz is the easiest place to see tortoises. Historically, the giant tortoises were once found on almost every island. During Charles Darwin's visit, the governor of the Galapagos mentioned that the tortoises' shells differed on each island, perhaps planting the idea for Darwin's famous theory. Today, many of these islands are tortoise-free. Predation by whalers, and the feral rats, cats, dogs, goats, and pigs on many of the islands wiped them out, as eggs and baby tortoises were eaten and the foliage often stripped bare by grazers.

Most tours include a day trip into the highlands of Santa Cruz to see tortoises. At several ranches here it is fairly easy to find Galapagos tortoises soaking in ponds or lumbering along in grassy fields or resting in the mossy, Hobbit-like forests. Tortoises also haunt the crater lakes at the top of several volcanos, but a visit there requires a full day on a pony or an overnight camping trip, depending on the mountain.

One of my favorite locations is Fernandina, the youngest island in the archipelago with a volcano that, while dormant right now, is still active. Ropey lines of lava pattern vast swaths of beaches and headlands where black marine iguanas gather to bask in the hundreds. Merged together in one mass the lizards meld into the rocks, only to delight the eye in surprise when one discerns that the rock is not a rock at all but a huge batch of lizards!

Another unique and endemic species found here is the flightless cormorant. Probably related to the South American neotropical cormorant that indeed can fly, this species lost this ability because of the lack of terrestrial predators. Similarly, I recently observed spineless prickly pear cactus in Hawaii, where this species evolved and gradually lost its spines since nothing, before man and his livestock colonized the islands, ate cactus. In both cases, energy that would have been devoted to flying wings or poking spines could be diverted to other needs instead.

The species and the islands I have just mentioned are just some of the highlights, but there are so many that I could go on forever. In addition to the photography, and seeing for yourself the intriguing examples of evolution, there is, quite simply, the joy of being with and often surrounded by animals that show no fear. In this way the islands are a kind of arid, hot, and prickly Garden of Eden. Lizards and birds and seals and Sally-lightfoot crabs and Galapagos tortoises and sea turtles and fishes go about their business within feet of you. In some cases even right on top of you, as when one of the four species of Galapagos mockingbird hops onto your arm or head.

Some destinations get on a bucket list due to canny marketing or a once-established and entrenched reputation but then fail to live up to your expectations. That is not the case here. The Galapagos truly does deserve its hype, and the experiences you will have here will be indelible. NP



Waved albatross, Española Island, Galapagos Islands, by Joe McDonald. Canon 1D Mark IV, Canon 24-105mm F4 L IS USM lens, focal length 40mm, f/16 at 1/800 second, spot metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 800.

# YES, YOU CAN

Article and Photography by Weldon Lee, Editor

Weldon's web site: <http://www.weldonlee.com/> (Click for Live Link)



African lion, Botswana's Moremi Game Reserve, by Weldon Lee.



African elephants, along the Chobe River at sunset in Botswana's Chobe National Park, by Weldon Lee.

Many times throughout the years, upon learning that I am a professional wildlife photographer, individuals have come up to me and remarked, "I would give anything to do what you do."

My typical response to their comment is, "You can." I usually follow up by adding, "No one hired me to do it. I made it happen—and you can, too!"

If you are an aspiring wildlife photographer who wants to turn pro and travel to exotic locations photographing our wild brothers and sisters, here's my message to you, "It matters not how old you are, you can do it."

In fact, you can do anything you put your mind to!

## *HERE IS MY STORY*

Although what I am about to relate is my story, by changing a couple of details, it can be your story, too.

It all began with my parents.

Growing up was an adventure I'll always treasure. I even remember the Christmas I received my very own Red Ryder BB gun.

If this is beginning to sound like the movie, "Christmas Story," perhaps it's because it took place back in the mid-

1940s. The only thing different was dad never had a lamp fashioned from a female mannequin's leg.

The other thing my parents gave me that I'll cherish as long as I live was a heaping measure of self-confidence. They instilled in me from the time I was a small boy that I could do anything that I wanted to do.

I may not be your parent, but I'm here to let you know that you, too, can do anything you put your mind to. Yes, you can.

Early in my adult life, for example, I started taking flying lessons. It didn't take long before I realized that it would be years, if ever, before I had enough money to fulfill my flying habit. So, after completing only two or three lessons, I made up my mind that I was going to earn my keep as a professional pilot. Five years later, I landed a job flying multiengine corporate jets.

Was it easy? Absolutely not. My major obstacle was the fact that I needed tons of flight hours to land a flying job and I didn't have the money to pay for them. I simply put together a plan and made it happen.

First, I worked on and obtained my Commercial license, followed by a Flight Instructor rating. Once this was com-

plete, I was in a position where I could build up my flight time and have others pay for it.

Like I said, you can do anything you put your mind to.

Then came the oil energy crunch in the late 1970s. Since the company where I was working built refineries and chemical plants for the oil and chemical industry, it hit them hard. One of the first things they did was to shut down the aviation department. A year later, the company where I had worked 17 years went bankrupt.

I was out of work.

Although I loved flying and could have easily gone to work as a pilot with another company, the writings of Henry David Thoreau had caused me to rethink my role as a human being. It was time for me to select a profession more in line with my beliefs and philosophy, one connected directly with nature and my wild brothers and sisters.

Throughout life I have delved into a variety of leisure pursuits, not the least of which was nature photography. However, I also loved painting. In fact, one of my first creations featured a watercolor rendition of a white-tailed doe wading across a small pond.

One thing was certain, since animals had been part of my life as long as I can remember, my focus—whether painting,

or photography—would be on wildlife. Having received my first camera as a third grader and taking pictures ever since, it was only natural that I would choose the latter.

When I look back now, I really had no choice. I was destined to become a wildlife photographer.

Following a short stint of food, people, product, and architectural photography, it was time to put on a different hat and begin pursuing my dream of becoming a full-time professional wildlife photographer.

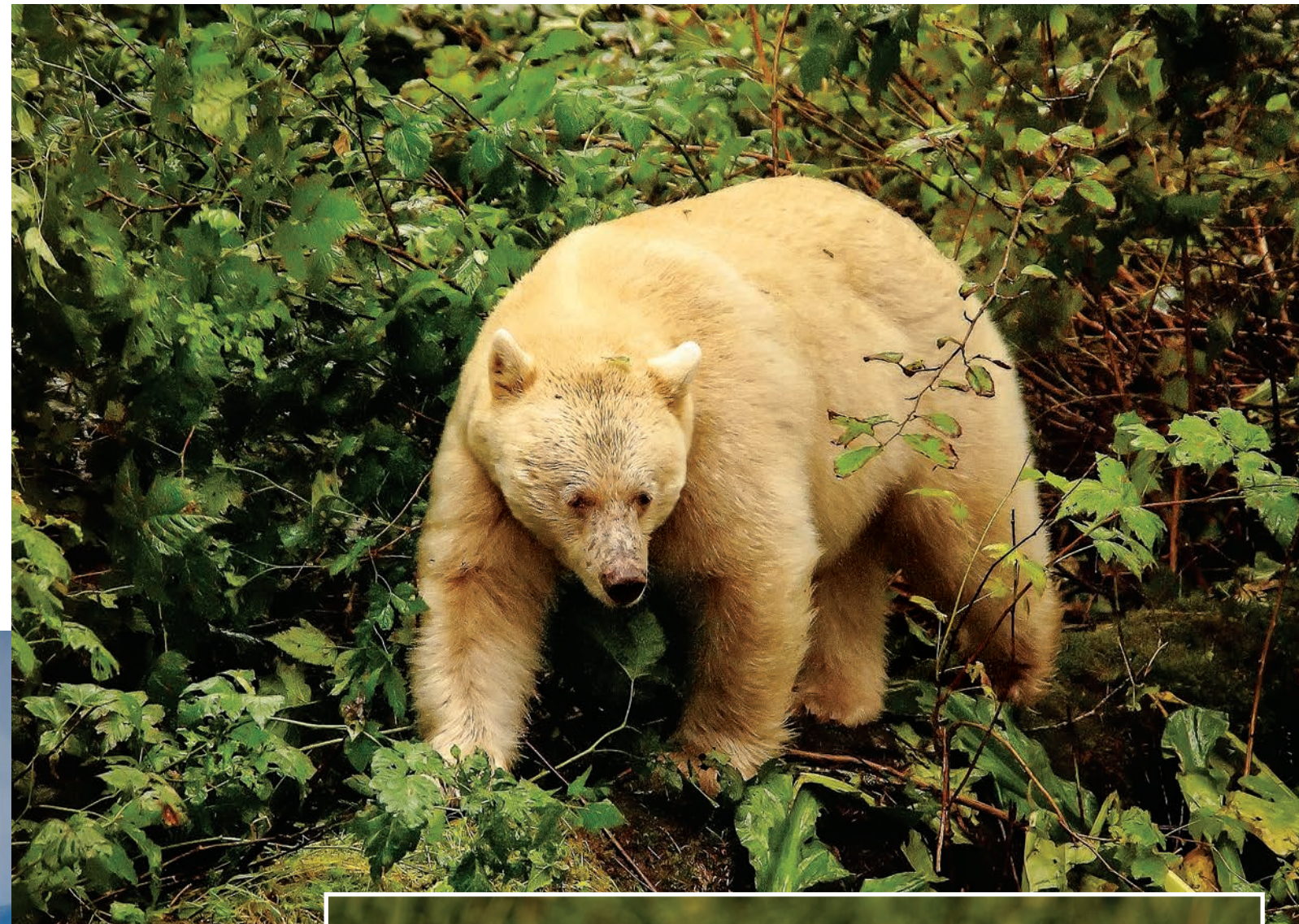
The only thing undecided when I began was where would I sell my photographs.

As fortune would have it, a phone conversation with my youngest son, Scot Lee, would change everything. He had moved to Colorado from Houston, Texas, a few months earlier and suggested that I do the same. That was November, 1987.

A few months later on Leap Year Day, February 29, driving a U-Haul truck loaded with all of my earthly possessions, my dog and I pulled into Boulder, Colorado.

It wouldn't be long before doors began opening and I would find myself in a full-time career that would last for many years.

Shortly after moving to Colorado, a forest fire started in the foothills near Boulder. Along with a bit of cross-country



Photos by Weldon Lee.

Above: Ghost bear, Princess Royal Island, British Columbia.

Right: Grizzly, Denali National Park, Alaska.

Facing Page: Dall's sheep, Primrose Ridge, Denali National Park, Alaska.





mountain hiking, I was able to get into a closed-off area near the fire, take a few images and sell them to Colorado Outdoors magazine.

This was responsible for opening doors and providing connections that allowed me to begin selling photographs of my wild brothers and sisters to magazines across the country.

About that time, another seemingly innocuous event would further change the direction I would take.

A couple of months after arriving in Colorado, I learned that one of the state parks was looking for volunteers to lead nature walks. Since that sounded like something I would enjoy, I volunteered.

This resulted in me being trained as an interpretive naturalist and allowed me to begin leading nature walks for park visitors. I was even given the opportunity to organize and lead walks of my own choosing. Why not feature one that focused on nature photography, I thought.

I did and it was a success.

This opened the door for me to begin working with a variety of municipal and county agencies, conducting one-day nature photography workshops.

This, too, became successful. So much so, that I eventually started my own company and began conducting photo workshops in many areas of the state.

After doing this for a few years, I felt it was time to spread out and begin photographing wildlife in other parts of the world. However, there was a problem.

Although I was busy selling photographs and leading workshops, there wasn't enough money left over at the end of the month for me to travel to those distant locations where elephants, lions, polar bears, and other exotic species could be photographed.

I had an idea. Why not organize workshops to these locations and charge people to go there? I could teach them how to make award-winning photographs of the animals we encountered and, at the same time, expand my image files.



Caribou, Denali National Park, Alaska, by Weldon Lee.



Waved albatross, Galapagos archipelago, by Weldon Lee.

Not only did it work, I have met some of the most wonderful people who in turn have become life-long friends.

Over the years, more doors would open as I began writing and selling articles to magazines.

I am charting a new course these days. Instead of focusing on stock photography, I am now involved in the business of wildlife photo art, selling my work on-line, in galleries, and at art festivals.

My reason for the change—in my opinion, Corbis and Getty ruined the stock industry.

One thing I would like to share before closing occurred a month, or so, after arriving in Colorado. I just happened to be listening to a radio broadcast and the host offered a piece of advice that I still remember.

He proclaimed that if you really want to be successful when beginning a new career, burn all the bridges behind you. In other words, don't leave any doors open that will allow you to return to your old life.

Hard?

Yes.

In fact there were times when it was very hard, but it worked.

#### CONCLUSION

Some may say that I was lucky. Not at all. Blessed yes, but certainly not lucky.

It took a lot of hard work, perseverance, and dedication.

Early in life, someone I barely knew shared this piece of advice with me. He said, "You don't have to be rich to do things you want to do. Use other people's money."

This has served me well. Not only did it allow me to build up the necessary flight time while pursuing a flying career, it allowed me to travel the world, where I photographed more of my wild brothers and sisters.

Here are what I call the Five Steps to Success. Follow them and live your dream.

Step 1—Know that you can do anything that you put your mind to.

Step 2—Decide what you want to do.

Step 3—Put together your plan.

Step 4—Burn all your bridges.

Step 5—Go to work and make it happen.

And, do not forget the hard work, perseverance, and dedication.

Whatever you do, don't look back some day and say, "I wish I had taken his advice."

Life is not a dress rehearsal. You only get one shot at it!

And don't forget, "Yes, you can."

Join me next time as we continue exploring ways of capturing the likenesses of our wild brothers and sisters. NP

# MABAMBA SWAMP'S ELUSIVE SHOEBILL STORK

Article and Photography by Denis D'Arbela, Field Contributor

**T**he Mabamba Swamp in Uganda is a uniquely-diverse ecosystem, and home to the endangered and elusive shoebill stork (*Balaeniceps rex*). The shoebill is a delight to observe in the wild and Mabamba Swamp is a wonderful destination for wildlife photographers.

The Swamp is located west of the Entebbe peninsula at the edge of Lake Victoria, about an hour's drive from Kampala. A good portion of the journey is on unfinished road, so it's best to visit during a dry season, either December-February, or June-July, as the trip is a challenge throughout the wet season when roads are muddy and slippery. It's also an excellent idea to make arrangements through a tour company in either Kampala or Entebbe.

I found a local tour guide on the internet, and drove myself to the boat landing in Kasanje where I met Maria and the boat operator. Both helped me load my camera gear onto the boat, a motorized craft about five feet wide, made out of local timber, with ample sitting for eight people. The tour guides have a thorough knowledge of the area and were in communication with each other about the possible location of the storks.

Papyrus towered over the boat on either side as we set off into the wide channel of the Swamp. It typically grows to a height of four to five feet and is ubiquitous in all the wetlands of Central Africa.

Because of its rich biodiversity, the Mabamba Swamp is listed as one of the International Ramsar sites. As we cruised along I noted the rich brown soil of the swamp bed which supported the dense papyrus forest, while both pink and purple water lilies, ferns, and plants of the cabbage family floated at eye level.

Once into the wider body of water, my guide pointed out numerous bird species as we made our way in search of the shoebill stork: pied kingfishers, great white egret, African pied wagtails, little bee-eaters, Eurasian bee-eaters, long-tailed cormorants, squacco herons, malachite kingfishers, and lots of African jacanas on the water's edge. The rare and timid papyrus gonolek can also be found in the Swamp, and, although we had a sighting, I was unable to get a photograph because they move so fast and my excitement paralyzed me for a moment.

Shoebill storks are found primarily in the central African countries of Southern Sudan, Uganda, Western Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Congo, Malawi, and Zimbabwe. There are roughly 5000 to 12,000 birds in the world, but their numbers are hard to gauge because much of their habitat is inaccessible. Their declining numbers in the wild are partly the result of habitat loss due to human encroachment and pollution.

They typically lay two to three eggs a year, which hatch in about 30 days. Due to predation and food availability, only one chick out of the three eggs will hatch and fledge at 95 days. The time to independence from a chick's parents is roughly 125 days, and they have an average lifespan of 36 years.

The shoebill's main diet is the lungfish, a fresh-water fish that resembles an eel and is common in Lake Victoria. Other prey includes tilapia, water snakes, monitor lizards, mollusks, and carrion. I watched in absolute awe the devouring of a specimen later that day within 20 feet of my boat.

The Mabamba Swamp has eight adult birds. I arrived about nine a.m. to find that earlier tours had seen the shoebill—it customarily takes to the air following a meal. As we



Facing Page: Shoebill stork, Mabamba swamp in Uganda, by Denis D'Arbela. Nikon D800, Nikkor 500mm F4 lens, focal length 500mm, f/9 at 1/250 second, center-weighted metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 200.



Squacco heron, Mabamba swamp in Uganda, by Denis D'Arbela. Nikon D810, Nikkor 500mm F4 lens f/8 at 1/8000 second, metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 2000.

scanned the sky, we saw one circling perhaps 1000 feet above us. It resembled a prehistoric dinosaur.

Time aloft can last a few hours. While watching the bird, we picked up chatter over the radio that another had been sighted by a different tour group. The boat operator turned us in that direction and we were off to join the others. The guides were very good at predicting the proximity of the storks location.

Aside from the demarcated channels, we wove through some of the swamp grass as the boat charted its way toward the stork. The grass was like a green carpet floating on the water and gave me the impression of being on solid ground. Sometimes flowering lilies poked their way through a break. We caught sight of two other tour boats and collided gently as we jockeyed into place, carefully avoiding any loud disturbance that would startle the bird.

The stork is about 43 to 55 inches tall and has a wingspan between seven to eight feet. An adult bird weighs between 8.8 and 15.4 pounds, the female is somewhat smaller than the male. I looked over on the left bank of a little island, and there it stood, unperturbed by its surroundings. Its grey plum-

age looked iridescently bluish—purple; its prominent beak, sleekly designed to devour the lungfish, set it apart from any other bird. We watched silently for about 10 minutes as the shoebill stood frozen, stoically staring into the water, looking for lungfish. It can maintain this behavior for hours until prey comes into sight, then will move gracefully, one foot in front of the other, stretching its long beak before it strikes. We noted movement in its wings and, with a whisper from one of the tourists saying, "It's about to move," it lifted its large wings and launched into the sky—we watched its silhouette against the midday glare.

We left the group, and my guide headed in a different direction to see if we could find another stork. We came across a purple heron nestled in the ferns, and yellow-billed ducks that instantly took flight when they caught sight of us. We saw more of them sunbathing with about 20 white-faced whistling ducks. There were also numerous sightings of long-toed lapwings, and one extremely nervous mother that blared in alarm at the top of her voice as we glided by her chicks.

Immersed in the moment—I concentrated on making images of the other birds while my guide and boat operator



Shoebill stork, Mabamba swamp in Uganda, by Denis D'Arbela.  
Above: Nikon D810, Nikkor 500mm F4 lens, focal length 500mm, f/5.6 at 1/4000 second, spot metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 640.  
Below: Nikon D800, Nikkor 500mm F4 lens, focal length 500mm, f/9 at 1/250 second, center-weighted metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 200.



constantly scanned the surrounding papyrus for the shoebill. At one point we moored the boat onto some solid ground. The guide decided we would search the grass for the stork, so I shed my footwear and followed her barefooted, not thinking of the danger of water snakes and other insects, as well as bilharzia, a water-borne parasitic worm found in subtropical fresh water.

Our instincts paid off and we discovered a shoebill quietly nestled in the papyrus about 30 feet from us. We slithered toward it on our stomachs, but the ground was quickly getting waterlogged, so we headed back to the boat.

The boat operator thought we'd have a better chance of seeing it from the water. We had a clear view and watched in silence for 10 minutes before we were startled into action as it took flight. Trying to keep my balance on the boat, I managed to take a few photographs as it flew past me. It landed

about 30 feet away and resumed scanning for prey. It dove clumsily into the water and came up empty-handed. I caught some video footage as it moved gracefully into position for its second attempt. I was caught off guard a second time, but the shoebill was successful. It tussled and wrestled a slithering lungfish in its beak. It decapitated its prey and swallowed it whole in a few gulps. I was ecstatic watching the shoebill's behavioral habits at close quarters and could have stayed for several more hours, but it was approaching two o'clock. I'd been oblivious to the scorching sun.

This first expedition into the Mabamba Swamp was a privilege. I got to see a wide variety of birds in their natural habitat, including the endangered shoebill stork. If you have a longing for off-the-beaten-path avian wildlife photography, then the Mabamba Swamp invites you. I recommend it to nature lovers and bird enthusiasts alike. NP

Images in Mabamba swamp in Uganda, by Denis D'Arbela.

Below: Nikon D800, Nikkor 500mm F4 lens, focal length 500mm, f/9 at 1/250 second, center-weighted metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 200.

Facing Page Top: Malachite kingfisher. Nikon D810, Nikkor 500mm F4 lens, f/5.6 at 1/8000 second, matrix metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 2000.

Facing Page Bottom: Long-toed lapwing. Nikon D810, Nikkor 500mm F4 lens, f/5.6 at 1/5000 second, spot metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 2000.



# RIPARIAN PRESERVE AT WATER RANCH

Article by John Gerlach and Barb Eddy, Editors  
Photography by John Gerlach, Editor

John's and Barbara's web site: [www.gerlachnaturephoto.com](http://www.gerlachnaturephoto.com) (Click for Live Link)



American avocet, Gilbert Water Ranch, Phoenix, Arizona, by John Gerlach. Canon EOS-1D X, Canon EF800mm F5.6L IS USM lens, focal length 800mm, f/7.1 at 1/1250 second, evaluative metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 400.



Black-necked stilt, Gilbert Water Ranch, Phoenix, Arizona, by John Gerlach. Canon EOS-1D X, Canon EF800mm F5.6L IS USM lens, focal length 800mm, f/5.6 at 1/640 second, evaluative metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 800.

Water is a precious resource in arid environments and a huge draw for many bird species. The Gilbert Water Ranch is located east of Phoenix, Arizona. It is a man-made wetland that contains several large shallow basins that are used to recharge the water table with processed waste water. These ponds attract huge numbers of bird species and many stay to nest at the ranch. Numerous hiking trails lead through the area and around the edges of the ponds. This is a popular place for walkers, bird watchers, and bird photographers. Since the birds see humans continuously walking the trails many become habituated to us, making them easy to approach within excellent photo range.

The ranch is surrounded by urban sprawl, so it is an oasis for a great deal of wildlife. Fortunately, unlike many parks that have hours unsuitable for photographers, this park is open from dawn to dusk! This allows photographers to take advantage of the best light early and late in the day. I first learned of this place while searching for waterfowl ponds in Phoenix. Oddly enough, Phoenix has many ponds within the city that attract wintering waterfowl during January and February and

often these birds become habituated to humans allowing outstanding photo opportunities!

I spent a week at the water ranch during the first week of April in 2016 after reading everything I could about it on the Internet. My main goal was to photograph two of my favorite wading birds—American avocet and black-necked stilt. Both species are incredibly graceful as they wade the shallow water feeding as they go. Usually I haven't found both species together, so it was such a pleasure to spend hours simultaneously photographing both at very close range. So far, the water ranch is the best place I have found to photograph both. Black-necked stilts are residents all year long, and American avocets arrive in the spring. There were plenty of stilts and avocets by early April and both nest at the ranch a little later. I have seen excellent images of them with their young made by other photographers later in the spring.

Plenty of different birds are present. Lots of least sandpipers and long-billed dowitchers probe the shallows for tiny insects. Snowy and great egrets and black-crowned herons offered some excellent photo chances. A few ducks were



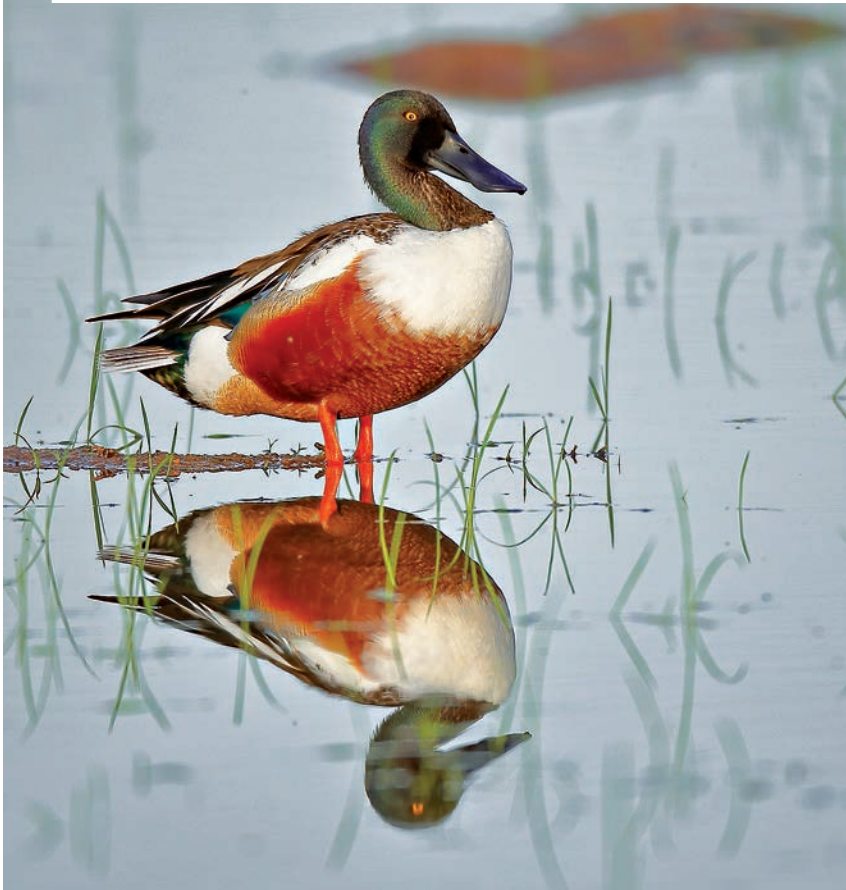
Gilbert Water Ranch, Phoenix, Arizona, by John Gerlach.

Above: Gila woodpecker. Canon EOS-1D X, Canon EF800mm F5.6L IS USM lens, focal length 800mm, f/7.1 at 1/1000 second, evaluative metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 400.

Left: Northern shoveler. Canon EOS-1D X, Canon EF800mm F5.6L IS USM lens, focal length 800mm, f/5.6 at 1/800 second, evaluative metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 500.

Facing Page Top: Least sandpiper. Canon EOS-1D X, Canon EF800mm F5.6L IS USM lens, focal length 800mm, f/7.1 at 1/1250 second, evaluative metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 400.

Facing Page Bottom: Killdeer. Canon EOS-1D X, Canon EF800mm F5.6L IS USM lens, focal length 800mm, f/6.5 at 1/1000 second, evaluative metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 500.



present in April, but more frequent the wetlands in midwinter before they migrate north again. I did manage fine images of mallards, cinnamon teal, blue-winged teal, and northern shoveler. The giant saguaro cacti at the entrance provides perfect nesting sites for Gila woodpeckers, starlings, curve-billed thrashers and mourning doves. These species are fun to photograph around the saguaros where they nest.

Though many of the birds are not especially afraid of humans, they do wander about a lot in the large ponds feeding as they go. It is illegal to enter the ponds and you would not want to do that anyway as it is reclaimed wastewater. This means you need long focal length to regularly get pleasing images from the pond edges. I used my favorite Canon 800mm F5.6 lens for all my photography here. The reach of the 800mm is outstanding. Keep in mind that I use full-frame sensor cameras with no crop factor. You would get the same view with a 500mm lens on a Canon 7D II, for example, with its 1.6x crop factor. Anything less than a 500mm or equivalent if you consider the crop factor is really too short here.

My Canon camera with the 800mm lens is mounted to a Wimberley gimbal head on a sturdy tripod. This setup nicely supports the weight while I wait for a bird to walk within photo range and lets me easily pan in any direction to follow actively feeding birds. There were other photographers present when I was there, but everyone got along just fine. The one thing I noticed is nearly everyone shoots handheld, no matter how long the lens. And just so you know, I always use a tripod whenever I possibly can and that is nearly all the time. The tripod gets me sharper images more frequently and supports the weight on the camera and lens while I am waiting for the bird to approach and pose. I simply don't understand why you would photograph handheld when a tripod is a viable option.

I shoot at 10 images per second or better and thoroughly work the subject. When birds are in a great photo spot, I often stay there for an hour or more to get the best images. Behavior such as feeding, preening, or simply stretching make wonderful images. I tend to be quiet and motionless most of the time. Often, I sit on the dirt near the edge of the pond and wait for my subjects to pose and approach within excellent photo range. I tend to like the harsh desert sun on the front of the bird, so in the morning you would find me on the east side of the ponds and evenings I look for choice photo spots on the west side of the ponds.

If the quantity of light permits, I try to keep the shutter speed faster than 1/1000 second and regularly use ISO 1000 with my Canon 1D X Mark II camera. As the feeding birds move about the pond in front of me, the background reflections may change from dark green to lighter sky blue rather rapidly, which is a disaster for all automatic metering systems. Therefore, I meter manually and set my exposure to produce a few blinking highlights in the scene. I only shoot RAW images. Since the histogram and highlight alert are derived by the in-camera processed JPG, the first blinking highlights do not indicate overexposure, but it is getting close. Since blinking highlights as viewed on the LCD screen are easier to see than the rightmost histogram data, it is a far more convenient way to arrive at a suitable exposure. If you shoot JPGs only, then add light until you get the first blinkies. Now subtract one-third stop of light to make them go away. Another advantage of Manual exposure is that ISO, shutter

speed, or aperture can be used to adjust the exposure. Be sure to monitor changes in ambient light though. In the morning, the ambient light typically gets brighter and the reverse happens in the evening. Unlike auto exposure modes, Manual exposure must be changed by the photographer as the ambient light varies in intensity.

I use continuous focus using a single AF point and move it around to coincide with the face of the subject. In this case, since the subjects are sometimes stationary, I prefer back-button focusing. When the bird is moving, I hold the back-button in while shooting to keep the camera autofocusing. If the bird holds still, I focus on the head by pushing in the back button, then let up on the button to lock focus, recompose if necessary and fire away. However, I am now experimenting with activating the AF points around the selected AF point to help me stay in sharp focus. (My eyes are getting worse with developing cataracts.)

All the images in this article were processed with the latest version of the free Canon software called DPP4. It is a huge upgrade over previous versions for processing Canon RAW files. It also is excellent for reviewing the images to decide what should be kept. I shoot a lot of images. It is nothing for me to shoot 3000 images in a single morning.

Using Canon Digital Photo Professional 4, here is how I edit 350 images of a least sandpiper. First, I select all 350 sandpiper images and move them to their own folder. Then I go to Quick Check in the software. I enlarge the images to 100% and look at the faces of the birds. And while doing this, I also check the thumbnails for poses. As I move through the images looking at sharpness, I press the number 1 on my computer keyboard to identify all sharp images. Should I notice the pose is terrible, I do not press #1 as I want to discard it. When I have gone through every image in the folder I put them in, I follow this process:

1. Leave Quick Check by pressing on EDIT IMAGE
2. Press EDIT
3. Press RATING
4. Press SELECT #1 or higher images
5. Press INVERT SELECTION (all the images that did not get a number 1 or higher are selected)
6. Press DELETE (all images are deleted from the folder, but can be recovered in the recycle bin)

Out of 350 images, I likely am down to less than fifty. But, I am not done yet. I pass through the images one more time and delete all uninteresting poses. I look for the poses that are unique and captivating. If I have five nearly identical poses that are excellent, I look for the best one and delete the rest. By the time I finish, I have less than 15 images to store on my external hard drives. By ruthlessly cutting down the images, it is far easier to find the ones I really want to use.

Although I am personally nervous (okay petrified) of urban environments, I found the water ranch was a pleasant place. You will have a wonderful time at the water ranch! It is an excellent place to photograph birds and the ubiquitous desert cottontails that are everywhere at the preserve—think rabbit farm. And by the way, there are some handsome burrowing owls to photograph at nearby Zanjero Park. Official web site: <http://www.riparianinstitute.org/> NP



Facing Page: Desert cottontail, Gilbert Water Ranch, Phoenix, Arizona, by John Gerlach. Canon EOS-1D X, Canon EF800mm F5.6L IS USM lens, focal length 800mm, f/5.6 at 1/640 second, evaluative metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 5000.

# SPRINGTIME IN PORTLAND JAPANESE GARDEN

Article and Photography by Michel Hersen, Field Contributor

Michel's web site: [Photographybymichel.net](http://Photographybymichel.net) (Click for Live Link)

In this era where our media repeatedly focus on unbridled violence, man's inhumanity to man, destruction of environmental resources, and mean-spirited politics, we all need a place of refuge to maintain our balance. For some a sense of repose is achieved through religion. For others visiting the natural wonders of the world provides the necessary balm. For still others a combination of religion and the

wonders of nature provide the necessary relief. Indeed, the mid-nineteenth century Hudson River painters in America, in transcendental fashion, saw nature as the representation of God's work on earth. Many of us travel long distances to regain spirituality by going to such places as Grand Canyon National Park, Yellowstone National Park, Yosemite National Park, Monument Valley, and Denali National Park, among



Portland Japanese Garden, by Michel Hersen.

Above: Weeping cherry. Nikon D300, Nikkor Zoom lens 18-200mm, Hoya circular polarizer, f/20 at 1/2 second, ISO 200, Gitzo tripod with Arca-Swiss head.

Facing Page Top: Strolling Pond Garden, weeping willow alternatively glowing between 8:00 and 9:00 a.m. Nikon D7100, Nikkor Zoom lens 18-200mm, Hoya circular polarizer, f/18 at 1/5 second, ISO 200, Gitzo tripod with Arca-Swiss head.

Facing Page Bottom: Strolling Pond Garden, Japanese maple. Nikon D7100, Nikkor Zoom lens 18-200mm, Hoya circular polarizer, f/18 at 2.5 second, ISO 200, Gitzo tripod with Arca-Swiss head.



others. But traveling long distances is not always necessary. There are smaller venues, even within big cities, where that sense of peace, repose, and tranquility may be achieved. One such place is the Portland Japanese Garden, nestled within Washington Park in Portland, Oregon.

The Portland Japanese Garden, philosophically dedicated to peace, harmony, and tranquility, provides a sense of spiritual renewal when one visits. The five separate gardens within its five-and-one-half acres have their unique identity: Flat Garden, Strolling Pond Garden, Tea Garden, Sand and Stone Garden, and Natural Garden. I have been visiting the Portland Japanese Garden for a decade and have photographed every nook and cranny. But each time I visit I find something new, a different lighting effect, or a detail that I may have overlooked in the past. The Garden has unique beauty in each of our four seasons. In a previous article published in the Fall/Winter 2010 Issue I documented autumn. In this article I reveal photographic possibilities during springtime.

In spring the pastel colors are at their best between March and May. A favorite photographic target is the iconic weeping cherry in the Flat Garden. I have found that it can be photographed as part of a larger environment near the Pavilion, a portion close-up, or under the canopy of the tree to give a high contrast effect. Often overlooked is the lush flowering cherry tree outside the entrance hovering over the garage.

There are many possibilities from the Strolling Pond Garden, including photographing from the Moon Bridge, which overlooks the Upper Pond and the small stream flowing to the Lower Pond. In one shot from the Moon Bridge toward the Upper Pond I simply focused on the water to capture the Monet-like reflections of the vernal trees. As you walk down

the Strolling Pond Road there is a pair of blue heron sculptures on the left-hand side, which I often use as foreground objects pointing to the more distant blooming azaleas.

In the Strolling Pond Garden there is an iconic Japanese maple tree that is photographed repeatedly in the fall by placing the camera under the canopy of the tree. I have found that this same tree photographs just as well in springtime, resulting in a pleasant tapestry of color. I rarely have seen any other photographers taking pictures of this tree at this time of year.

Between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. in the morning light is particularly lovely in the Strolling Pond Garden, alternatively glowing or producing chiaroscuro effects. At the bottom of the Strolling Pond Garden facing the Lower Ponds is Heavenly Falls, where full-frame shots and close-ups work equally well, especially with a touch of azalea or rhododendron color.

The Portland Japanese Garden houses a beautiful Tea Garden, and when the structure is open you can get a nice shot framing a pagoda, fencing, and greenery. There also is an excellent view, when flowers are in full bloom, of the arbor in the outer tea garden. If you are looking for a Zen-like experience you should head to the Sand and Stone Garden. When the light is just right the moss-covered rocks in the finely raked pea gravel are glowing on the rims. The overall effect is quite beautiful and inspiring.

The Natural Garden, as its name implies, receives less grooming from the Gardens' groundskeepers. Replete with small pools, rivulets, and cascades, it can be quite charming. Camellias, rhododendrons, azaleas, hosta, ferns, and moss-covered rocks abound. Innovative photography is certainly possible here. It only is a matter of imagination. NP



Portland Japanese Garden, by Michel Hersen.  
 Above: Stream from Moon Bridge. Nikon D7100, Nikkor Zoom lens 18-200mm, Hoya circular polarizer, f/18 at 1.3 second, ISO 200, Gitzo tripod with Arca-Swiss head.  
 Facing Page: Sand and Stone Garden, moss-covered rocks in finely raked pea gravel. Nikon D300, Nikkor Zoom lens 18-200mm, Hoya circular polarizer, f/20 at 1/10 second, ISO 200, Gitzo tripod with Arca-Swiss head.

# Showcase of Images



*"The sun does not shine for a few trees and flowers,  
but for the wide world's joy."*

*Henry Ward Beecher*



Above: Garrapata Beach (Highway 1), Big Sur, California by Bill S. Petrunich, Field Contributor. Nikon D4, Nikkor 14-24mm F2.8 G AFS ED (Nano Crystal Coat) zoom lens, focal length 14mm, f/22 at 1/20 second, spot metering mode, manual exposure mode, WonderPana 145 Circular Polarizing Filter with Singh-Ray 3-Stop Hard-sided Split ND Filter, ISO 100, Really Right Stuff TVC-34L Versa Series 3 Tripod with BH-55 Really Right Stuff ball head using Cable Release MC-30.

Facing Page: Delaware Water Gap Recreational Area, Dingmans Ferry, Pennsylvania, by Jay OBrien, Field Contributor. Nikon D300, Nikkor 18-200mm F3.5-5.6 lens, focal length 22mm, f/22 at 3 seconds, matrix metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 200.

*"Joy, rather than happiness, is the goal of life,  
for joy is the emotion which accompanies  
our fulfilling our natures as human beings.  
It is based on the experience of one's identity  
as a being of worth and dignity."*

*Rollo May*

*"Let us always meet each other with a smile,  
for the smile is the beginning of love."  
Mother Teresa*

*"Our language has wisely sensed the two sides of being alone.  
It has created the word loneliness to express the pain of being alone.  
And it has created the word solitude to express the glory of being alone."  
Paul Tillich*



Hamilton Pool, Hamilton Pool Preserve, Texas, by Jim L. Shoemaker, Field Contributor. Canon EOS 5DS R, Canon EF16-35mm F2.8L USM lens, focal length 27mm, f/16 at 2.5 seconds, evaluative metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 100, tripod.



Treeline at twilight, by Dave Johanson, Field Contributor. Nikon D300, Nikkor 18-200mm F3.5-5.6 lens, focal length 31mm, f/8 at 1/500 second, matrix metering mode, automatic exposure mode, ISO 200, tripod.

*"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and  
everyone who loves is born of God and knows God."  
I John 4:7*

*"To find joy in work is to discover the fountain of youth."  
Pearl S. Buck*

*"To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying  
to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment."  
Ralph Waldo Emerson*



Young rabbit on its first day venturing into the world, by Benjie L. Thomas, Field Contributor. Nikon D5000, Nikkor AFS 50mm F1.4G lens, focal length 50mm, Hoya HD UV Filter, Hoya Pro1 Digital MC Circular Polarizer, f/2.8 at 1/640 second, spot metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 600.

These rabbit images weren't made in a wilderness setting, but rather in my back yard. For some reason a wild mother rabbit thought it would be a good place for her den. Unfortunately my three dogs found it before I did. This baby rabbit was the only survivor of three. I found an old drawer and placed it over the den to protect the rabbit from the dogs. I kept the dogs in the house except when they were outside doing their business so the mother could keep the little one fed. Fortunately I had my camera with me on the day the baby rabbit finally decided to venture into the world. It made its way into some bushes and I assume the mother took it from there. BLT

Note from the Editor: When wild animals that live nearby our homes choose to share their lives with us it is truly a gift.



Above: Green heron and young, by Eugenia Mills, Field Contributor. Canon EOS 70D, Canon EF100-400mm F4.5-5.6L IS USM lens with 2x III teleconverter, focal length 800mm, f/11 at 1/800 second, partial metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 1600.

Below: Juvenile great horned owls, by Mark D. Pickell, Field Contributor. Nikon D810, Nikkor 80-400mm F4.5-5.6 lens with teleconverter, focal length 550mm, f/8 at 1/1000 second, matrix metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 380. These young owls transition from being helpless to accomplished hunters in a few short weeks. MDP



*"Enthusiasm moves the world."  
Arthur Balfour*



Osprey with fish, by Willy Onarheim, Field Contributor. Nikon D3S, Nikkor 600mm F4 lens, focal length 600mm, f/4 at 1/3200 second, matrix metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 1000.

Right: Swans, Six Mile Lake, Ellsworth, Michigan, by Arlene Allan, Field Contributor. Nikon D7200, Nikkor 150-500mm F5-6.3 lens, focal length 170mm, f/6 at 1/250 second, center-weighted metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 100, handheld. This image was captured while I was riding in a pontoon boat on Six Mile Lake. AA



Below: Fox kit at den, by Fred McCagg, Field Contributor. Nikon D5200, Nikkor 70-300mm F4.5-5.6 lens, focal length 300mm, f/5.6 at 1/100 second, matrix metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 100.



*“Creativity is a natural extension of our enthusiasm.”  
Earl Nightingale*



American beaver, Teton National Park, by Sam and Brenda Fletcher, Field Contributors. Nikon D800, Nikkor 80-400mm F4.5-5.6 lens, focal length 400mm, f/7.1 at 1/400 second, matrix metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 1250, tripod.

*“The awareness of the ambiguity of one’s highest achievements  
(as well as one’s deepest failures)  
is a definite symptom of maturity.”  
Paul Tillich*



Black bear and her brown cub, Pennsylvania, by Phyllis Wimer, Field Contributor. Nikon D300S, Nikkor 70-200mm F2.8G IF-ED lens, focal length 200mm, f/8 at 1/100 second, spot metering mode, auto exposure mode, ISO 500.

Photo was taken through my open “shooting” (photography) window on my wild land (at our camp) near Sproul State Forest in the 13-county area known as the Pennsylvania Wilds. PW

*“But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious,  
longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth.”  
Psalm 86:15*

# ANSWERING THE DOOR

Article by Helen Longest-Saccone, Editor  
Photography by Marty Saccone, Editor

Marty's web site: [marty-saccone.pixels.com](http://marty-saccone.pixels.com) (Click for Live Link)

*"What is a farm but a mute gospel?"*  
Ralph Waldo Emerson

Right: Umber, a 1600-pound brown Swiss cow, Tide Mill Organic Farm, Edmunds, Maine, by Marty Saccone. Nikon D800E, focal length 200mm, f/5.6 at 1/350 second, matrix exposure mode manual metering mode, ISO 400.

Umber is the queen of the cows—she is regal and has a wonderful attitude toward herd members and people. She is very special to me and also other humans at the farm. His



Overview of pasture and century-old farm house which is available as a summer vacation rental, Tide Mill Organic Farm, Edmunds, Maine, by Marty Saccone. Nikon D800E, focal length 200mm, f/5.6 at 1/400 second, matrix exposure mode, manual metering mode, ISO 400.

Tide Mill Organic Farm web site: <http://www.tidemillorganicfarm.com>

This is article No. 2 in a series about lessons learned at Tide Mill Organic Farm in Aaron Bell's dairy barn. In such an unlikely place—a barn—God draws me closer to Him.

*"The Lord your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save;  
He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love,  
He will rejoice over you with singing."  
Zephaniah 3:17*

God is using the farm to teach me to accept each day and to know He is always with me. I am learning that both "good" and "not-so-good" events are gifts. My eyes have been opened to the fact that farming takes the ultimate acts of patience and faith. Let me introduce you to the folks who make this experience possible for me.

After college, Aaron Bell and his wife, Carly, returned to Edmunds and began farming the Bell family land again as Tide Mill Organic Farm (TMOF). Aaron is a member of the eighth generation Bell to farm at Tide Mill. He and Carly have four children who help with the daily chores. Aaron's younger brother, Jesse, and his parents, Bob and Jane, together with apprentices and several employees, comprise the work force. TMOF raises USDA certified organic vegetables, meat birds, laying hens, pigs, turkeys, and also have an organic dairy of seventy animals. Balsam fir wreaths can be purchased at Christmas. Aaron's cousin, Rachel, with her husband, Nate, and their children, operate Tide Mill Creamery on Tide Mill Farm.

Within the barn, there is a sense that God is in control and that whatever is happening is the result of His hand. On December 16, 2016, as the temperature dipped below zero, Aaron was challenged to let his life unfold in the calm manner which is the trademark of who he is. Here is Aaron's e-mail to me the next evening in reply to an e-mail I had sent to him the previous day wishing him well on his delivery run of their farm products. It begins to tell the story of a farmer's life.

*"Hi Helen, yes, all went well in the frigid conditions yesterday. I got all the Blue Hill and Bar Harbor deliveries done. When I finally made it home around midnight, I was checking the barn and found that the furnace for the milk room and parlor was not working. I fixed that and it started making heat to keep pipes from freezing in those areas. I was about to check on the chicken buildings when the Whiting Volunteer Fire Department tones went off; I got a text and phone call that there was a fire alarm activation at the Whiting town hall. The delivery truck was idling all warmed up beside the barn, so I hopped in and cruised up to investigate. Three other Whiting volunteer fire fighters were there and we searched the building but could find nothing wrong. We had to wait for a town selectman with a key to let us in the Whiting town office. We disarmed the alarm and then I headed back to the farm.*

*I found the turkeys had tried to roost on the extension cord that supplies power to the chick room and brooder; the plug was disconnected. I moved the turkeys and got the heat and light resupplied for the tiny chicks. I then checked on the big greenhouse by the processing building that houses the larger chickens during winter. I found the propane hood that supplies supplemental heat during extreme cold, was out. The pilot light had failed. I reignited that and observed for about ten minutes; then turned on the heat and it worked.*

*By now it was 3:30 this morning! I went home and filled the outdoor wood boiler and our inside woodstove and went to bed. I had to carry our son to his own bed as he was asleep in our room and I checked on all the other kids; they were asleep under their covers, except for our youngest, who was at my parents' home. I finally was ready for bed. I switched off my alarm that is set to go off at 4:30, as that was less than an hour away. I knew Colin was milking this morning. Carly was snoozing away and I soon was snoozing too.*

*Then today happened at just as fast a pace! Thanks for reading my little story Helen, and thanks for looking after the cows. Aaron"*

Aaron's preparation that morning for his delivery of their products had begun prior to 6:00 a.m. in below zero temperatures. It was 21+ hours later before he was back in his home. Fourteen hour workdays are normal for Aaron and Carly as well as for other organic family farmers across America.

As I observe Aaron's patience at the barn, the words of Romans 5:3 come to mind—"And not only [so] but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience."

Farming is not an easy way of life, but local farms are important to each of us across America. When I was young in Beaufort, North Carolina, there were small farms around my home; we did not call them organic, but they were. In my youth, we ate local and did not realize that one day it was going to be very special and unique to do so. Life was simple, churches were full, and we found joy and satisfaction in whatever we did; whether we were a military person, doctor, nurse, fisherman, farmer, mechanic, attorney, clerk in a store, homemaker, secretary, woodsman, teacher, business owner, maid, whatever job we did—we performed our work to the best of our ability. And, when life took a turn, we turned to God and to Jesus. "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding." Proverbs 3:5

My work at Tide Mill reminds me about how incredibly important it still is for me to turn to God, to have faith, to ask Him for help, and to listen. Dairy cattle are big animals; even a calf at birth weighs close to what I weigh. I feel small in the barn, but I also feel God and I know through faith that Jesus is always with me. In Matthew 28:20, Christ said, ". . . I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

Whether I am throwing hay for the cows, cleaning calf pens, filling water tubs, loving and brushing Wish2 and helping care for the other heifers, steers, and cows, I feel God.

He is teaching me to willingly accept each day. God has opened my heart to Him and to Jesus wherever I am; whether at the farm, here in the office working on this magazine, on the highway, running errands, in church, or talking with friends. God is always in charge, and however each day unfolds, whether smooth or a challenge, He is always with all of us—you and me.

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*"Hate is not the opposite of love; apathy is."*  
Rollo May



Above: Poppies and lupine, Figueroa Mountain, Los Padres National Forest, California, by Craig Malburg, Field Contributor. Nikon D200, focal length 150mm, f/16 at 1/40 second, matrix metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 160.

Facing Page Top: "Keeping Watch"—silhouetted great blue heron, Florida, by Ted Griffin, Field Contributor.

Facing Page Bottom: White pelicans, Klamath Wildlife Refuge in Oregon By Gregory A. Vinyard, Field Contributor. Nikon D200, Nikkor 80-400mm F4.5-5.6 lens, focal length 400mm, f/8 at 1/800 second, center-weighted metering mode, manual exposure mode, ISO 200.

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28th Year...

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In memory of the pets who have shared each person's life.

Jungle 4/6/1996-11/5/2007  
Helen's & Marty's companion.



Back Cover: Sunrise looking east from Mather Overlook towards the distant Confusion Range, Great Basin National Park, Nevada, by Rinus Baak, Field Contributor. Canon EOS 1D Mark IV, Canon EF 70-200mm F2.8 L IS II USM lens, focal length 200mm, f/11 at 1/200 second -0.7 compensation, spot metering mode, ISO 400, Gitzo GT 3540 LS tripod, Kirk ballhead.

*"The first duty of love is to listen."  
Paul Tillich*



*"Never lose an opportunity for seeing anything that is beautiful;  
For beauty is God's handwriting—a wayside sacrament.  
Welcome it in every fair face, in every fair sky, in every fair flower,  
And thank God for it as a cup of His blessing."  
Ralph Waldo Emerson*