

# QUACK

---

Newsletter of E.J. Peiker, Nature Photographer and [www.EJPhoto.com](http://www.EJPhoto.com)  
All contents ©2009 E.J. Peiker

Autumn 2009  
(Vol 7, Issue 5)

Welcome to the quarterly newsletter from E.J. Peiker Nature Photography and [www.EJPhoto.com](http://www.EJPhoto.com). In this quarterly email publication, I will keep subscribers posted on upcoming workshops including the DuckShop Workshop Series as well as sharing some photos and experiences with you. I will also give you brief impressions on any new equipment that I get the opportunity to use and any other general information in the world of digital nature photography. Please feel free to forward this along to other photographers and interested parties but please do so only by forwarding this newsletter in its entirety. Note that all content is copyrighted by E.J. Peiker. If you would like to be added or deleted to the mailing list, just send me an email message at [ejpeiker@cox.net](mailto:ejpeiker@cox.net). Back issues are available online at <http://www.ejphoto.com/newsletter.htm>



Hayden Peak - Point Imperial, Grand Canyon National Park (D3x, 24-70mm)

## **Best Photo Locations**

In this and future newsletter's I will begin to share my "Best" list. This is a compilation of what I think are some of the very best photo locations in the USA. I hope you enjoy them. Here are eight to get us started:

*Best Mountain Meadow – Skyline Ridge Meadow, Mount Baker Wilderness, Washington.* A 2 mile steep hike with serious elevation change through a forest finally opens up to the largest meadow I have ever seen. It basically is a meadow formed just above timberline and when you go to the high point of the meadow you have a full 360 degree view of the Cascades including Mount Baker to the south, Mount Shuksan to the east, the Canadian Cascades to the north, and the foothills all the way to the coast Victoria to the west. It is simply too breathtaking to describe. In July and early August, there are also plenty of wildflowers. This is the single most breathtaking scene I have seen.



Mount Baker at Sunrise Ridge, WA (D3x, 24-70mm)

*Best Mountain Range – The Teton Range, Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming.* The Tetons are just plain breathtaking. The sharp craggy appearance that jumps out of the ground from the high plains and the incredible vistas from places like Schwabacher Landing, June Lake, Snake River overlook and many many more are just incredible. Additionally, there is plenty of wildlife with Moose, Elk, Bison, and Pronghorn plus many beautiful horses making this a premiere wildlife destination as well. Early Summer when the wildflowers bloom or Early Autumn when the Aspens glow their golden color is the best time to visit. While there, you are just an hour from Yellowstone, another premier photography location. You simply cannot go wrong in northwestern Wyoming.

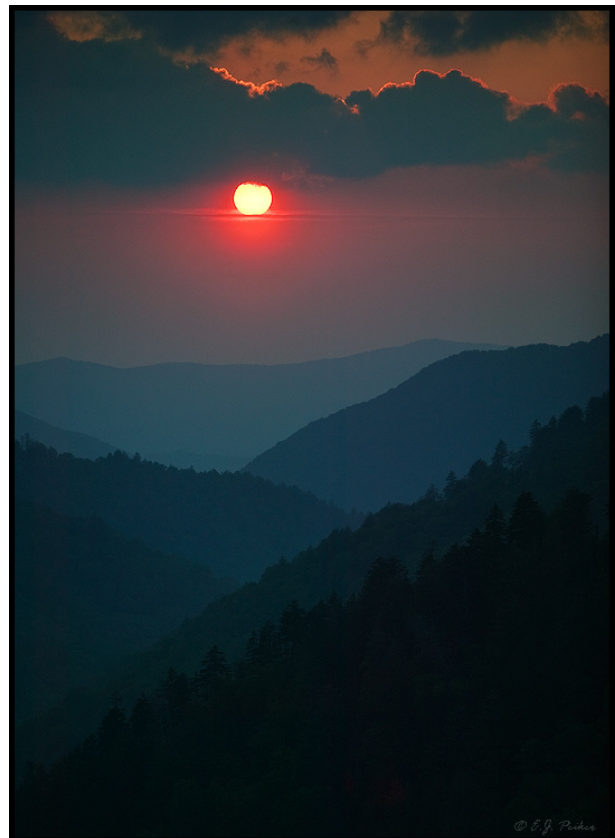


Teton Range at Schwabacher Landing, Grand Teton national Park, WY (EOS 1Ds Mark II, 24-70mm)

*Best Sunrise Location – Haleakala Crater, Maui, Hawaii.* One needs to drive up to the top of the Haleakala crater in the very early morning hours to witness the spectacle of the sun rising from above the marine layer and light up the Mars like volcanic landscape of Haleakala. Add a rare Silver Sword plant to the mix and you have some of the most amazing and other worldly scenery anywhere. Be warned though, you will share this spectacle with hundreds every day and be prepared for some very cold temperatures at 11,000 feet.

*Best Sunset Location – Morton's Overlook, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee.* It is said that the Smoky Mountain's produce more of the lower 48 United State's oxygen than anywhere else. This leads to a haze that is present which at sunset creates some incredible colors in our star's disk. It also creates a beautiful layered effect in the mountains which can best be seen at Morton's. This is a sunset shooting location. Get there early for the best spots at the roadside turn off.

Morton's Overlook, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, TN (EOS 1Ds Mark II, 70-200mm)



## The Switch, One Year Later

It has now been a full year since I made the switch from Canon to Nikon so I thought it might be a good time to write about what I like and don't like about my new system.

To recap why I made the switch to begin with; after several years of waiting for Canon to produce a high end wildlife zoom lens like the Nikon 200-400 f/4 VR lens, I finally gave up the wait before my Namibia trip in September 2008. I purchased a D300, D700, 200-400, 17-35, 24-70 and 70-200 for the trip. This system served me well and I was extremely pleased the way most of the gear performed (see comments on the 70-200 f/2.8 VR below). I hung onto my Canon gear until late 2008 while I waited for the Nikon 500VR to arrive. I have since also added the D3x. This leads me to the first thing, and one of two very large issues I have with Nikon – availability of high end gear. Nikonians are fairly used to waiting months for high end gear even if they are a Nikon Professional services Member (which I am). Nikon seems to always under produce their highest end equipment and allocate with a slant towards nation's whose currency is strongest



compared to the Japanese yen. Even simple things like 1.4x converters can take weeks to months to obtain through normal channels. While an NPS membership does cut this down by maybe 50%, even waiting three weeks for a simple 1.4x teleconverter is ridiculous. A wait of more than four months for a 500mm VR is just crazy. When I photographed with Canon equipment, virtually anything I ever wanted, I could have the next day with overnight shipping from many vendors.

My second peeve is the treatment of warranties by Nikon USA. Nikon USA will not honor the warranty of their equipment in the USA unless it was purchased in the USA from an authorized dealer. They are trying to eliminate gray market imports but Nikon USA has to wake up that they are playing in a global economy. What's worse, they won't even service a non USA purchased item for any

amount of money. Let's say I'm out on an important shoot in some remote location in North America and I lose or destroy an important piece of gear. Quite often the USA warranty item is not immediately available but a gray market version might be. I now must either buy the gray market item to continue the shoot knowing that I can never get it serviced which may make it a throw away item (in some cases, a pretty high priced throw away item) or miss the shots I need to get.

The final problem is with Nikon software. At this writing, almost four years since the introduction of 64 bit versions of Windows. Nikon still does not support 64 bit computing. On the Mac side, their software does not work properly with the latest OS - Snow Leopard while virtually other Mac software package on the planet works with no modifications. The apps themselves, while powerful are so slow on most computers that in most cases they are just not worth the trouble. The programs are buggy, have poor support and require a lot of patience to deal with crashes, installation problems, updates that don't always work as intended and so on. Like I did with Canon, I pretty much stay away from the camera manufacturer's software. The software issues also translate to camera firmware which is arranged in a haphazard and hodgepodge method and needs a thorough overhaul with an eye towards software ergonomics. While the high level menu structure is very intuitive, the items in the next levels are not arranged logically or in order of most likely to be used to least likely to be used.

Well I've started this article on a pretty negative note so let's turn this thing around. While I think Nikon business practices are protectionist and completely ignorant of a global economy, the gear is great. Certainly it has its weaknesses, like anything else, but overall I am very pleased. Reliability of my gear after one year has been perfect. I have not had a single failure of any kind and every single piece of equipment has been flawless out of the box. All of the lenses have been perfectly calibrated to all three of my bodies with no focus calibration adjustment needed on any of them. For reference on the Canon system, there was almost never a three month period where at least one item didn't need to be serviced and virtually every lens was slightly different for focus calibration.

Image quality, especially on the D3x, is stunning at lower ISO and if low light shooting is necessary, nothing beats the D700 for low noise at high ISO. Autofocus on these bodies is so far beyond anything else I've used that it's almost laughable. This includes initial acquisition, tracking and low light autofocus. There simply is no comparison in this regard to previous systems I have owned. The user interface, while one of the areas that could be improved, is at least relatively consistent between pro bodies, semi-pro bodies, and amateur bodies. As stated earlier, the user interface in that the menu structure is a kludge of many years of just adding and adding things to the menus to the point where the layout is now not logical and most used items are often at the bottom of long lists rather than at the top. Fortunately one can configure a custom menu page for items you need most. Overall customizability of the camera is incredible and again beyond anything I've used before. And this translates all the way down to the D300.

I have been very pleased with the Nikon lenses with one exception. The 70-200 f/2.8 VR lens has very poor corner and edge image quality on FX sensor bodies. It clearly was designed in the DX only era and thus not enough attention was paid in its design for edge sharpness. Nikon recently announced a new version of this lens to try to address this problem. I already have one on order. The 70-300VR lens which is about 1/3 the price blows the 70-200 away for edge and corner image quality although you do give up 2 stops of light - and that is a relatively low priced consumer grade lens. The other lenses have been outstanding and my workhorse lenses, the 24-70 for landscapes and the 200-400 for wildlife are exceptional lenses. I haven't used the 500 VR too much yet but image quality is superb. My only complaint with that lens is that the spool up lag for the VR seems to be two to three times as long as the equivalent Canon lens' lag. This has forced me to change my shooting style slightly.



The 17-35 f/2.8 lens, while a very old design at this point still holds its own although the corners leave a bit to be desired for sharpness. I have not yet invested in the excellent 14-24mm lens since it cannot be used with filters easily.

Overall I have been very pleased with the switch and have no regrets. Certainly there are things that could be better but that is true for every manufacturers products. As always, I try not to sugar coat the issues and have no problem talking negatively about gear that I have invested my own cash in.

### **Photoshop Tip of The Quarter**

More than a couple of you sent me an email after the last issue of Quack to make sure that I knew that I did not include a Photoshop Tip of the Quarter in the last issue. To make up for it, I will include two related ones this quarter.

Correcting barrel and pincushion distortion:

Many of today's lenses, especially the cheaper kit lenses but also lenses designated as pro lenses like the Canon 17-40mm f/4L suffer from rectilinear distortions. These are commonly known as pincushion (inward bending of straight lines) and barrel distortion (outward bending of straight lines). Pincushion distortion of landscape photos which gives the appearance of the curvature of the earth being in the opposite direction is especially annoying in photographs. The capability to quickly and easily fix these lens distortions has been in the Photoshop Lens correction filters for quite some time but many seem to have not found it. It's very simple to use and Adobe even gives you a grid to make it easier to get a true straight horizon or truly straight vertical lines.

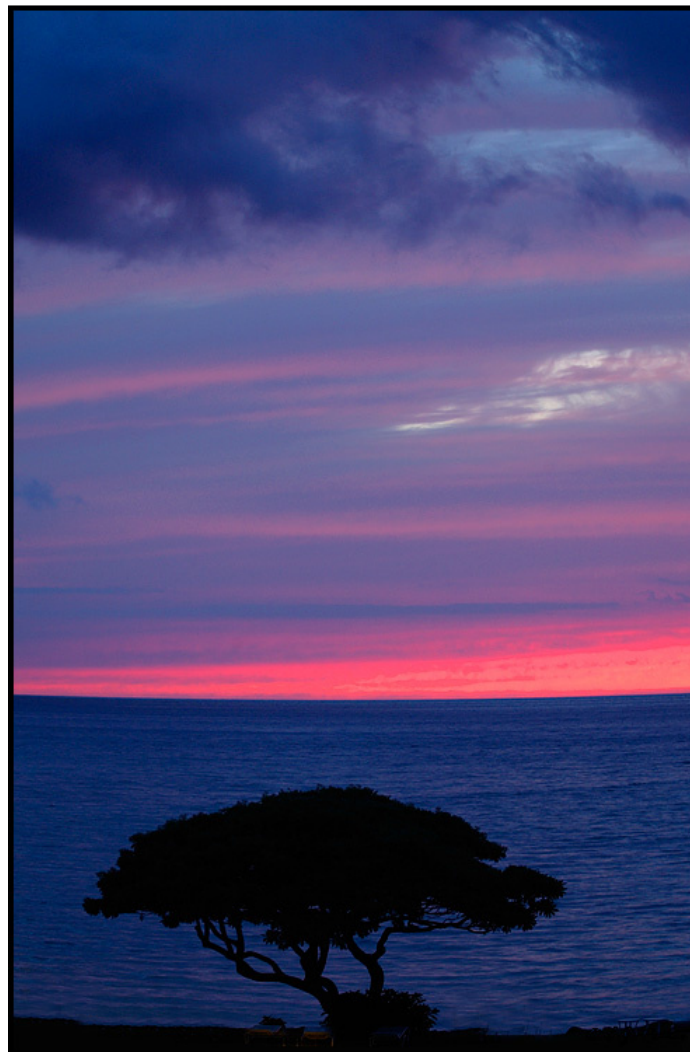
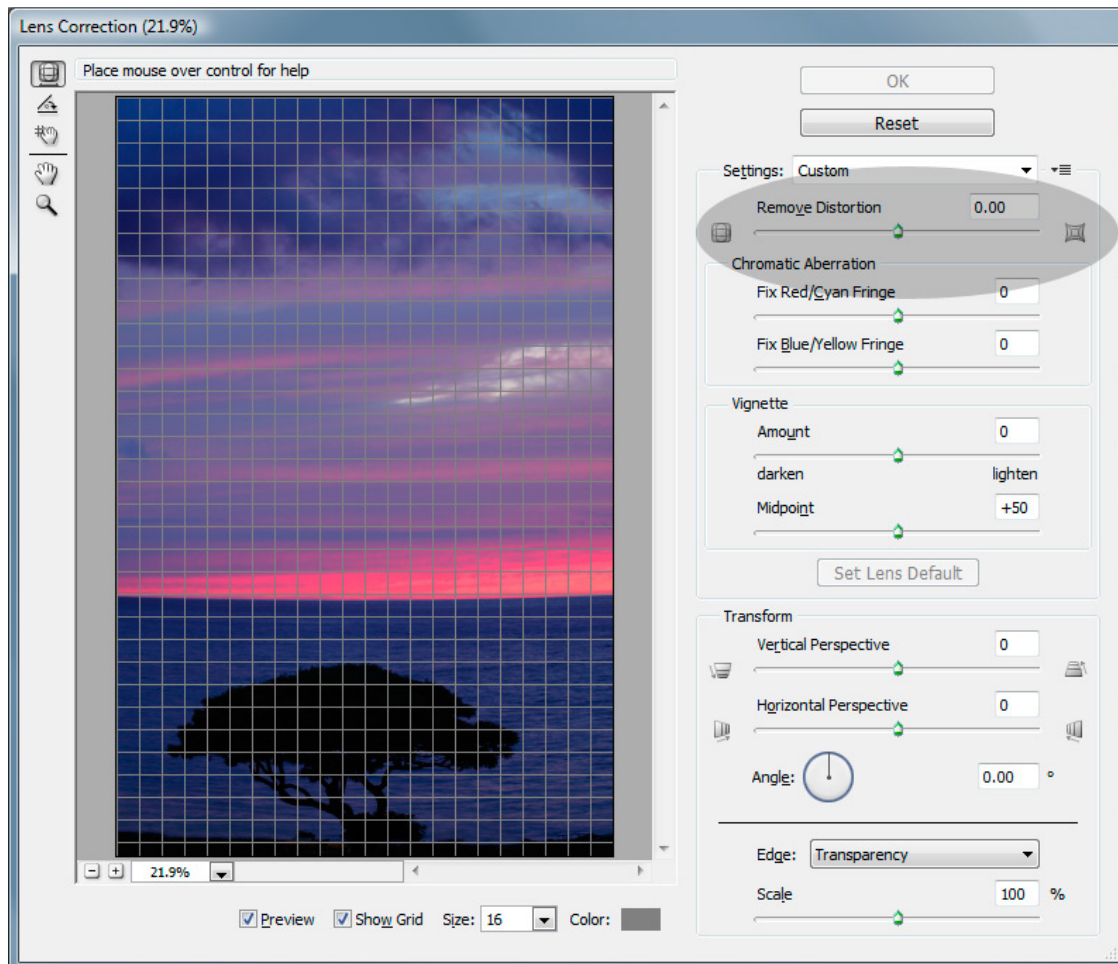


Image exhibiting severe barrel distortion

Here's how it's done:

Open your photo and click on Filter > Distort > Lens Correction. This will open the Lens correction filter which allows you to make many corrections to common lens

shortcomings such as chromatic aberrations, vignetting and perspective. All you need to do to correct any curved horizons or verticals is to move the slider under Remove Distortion to the left or right. You will quickly see why the grid pattern superimposed over your image is so useful as it really makes it easy to get the line perfectly horizontal.



When you have the lines straightened, just click on OK and the image will be corrected. You will usually have to do a little cropping of the edges to get rid of space that is no longer there due to the bending in of the image. This is only the case with barrel distortion since the vertical and horizontal lines need to be bent inward to correct those.



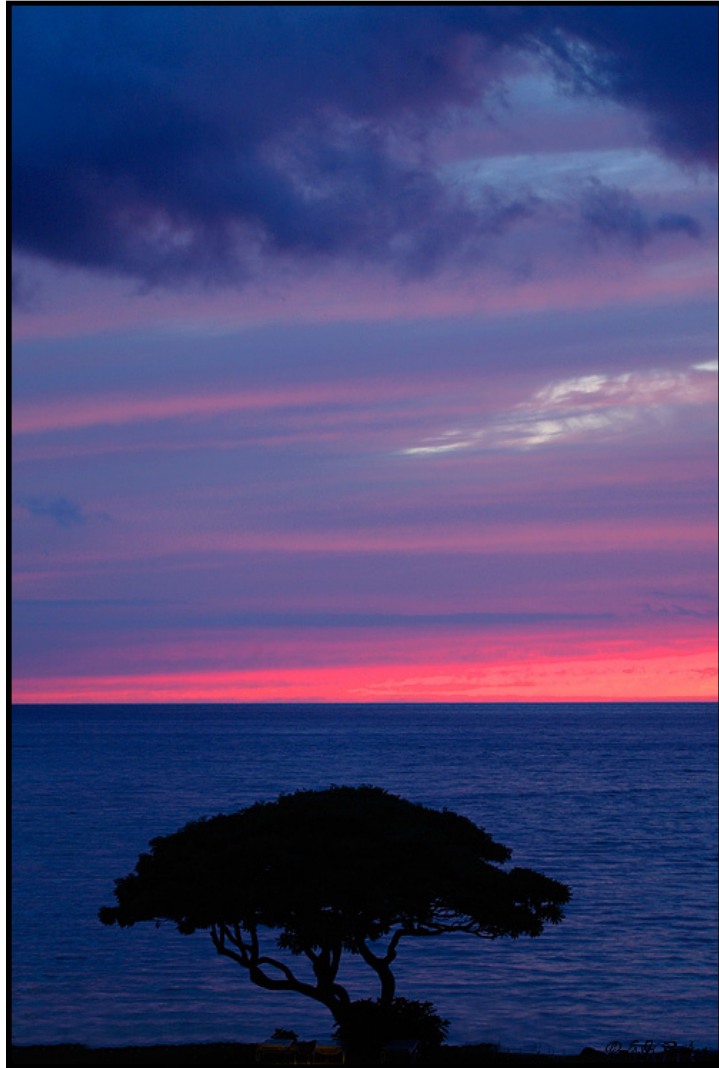


Image after correction

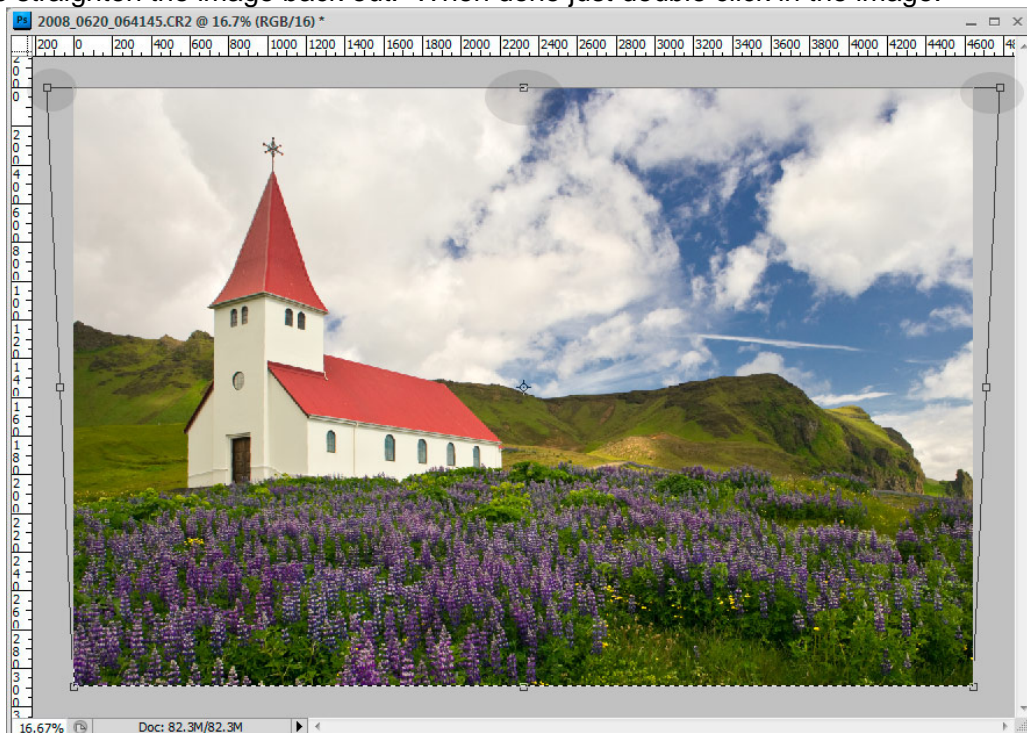
### Correcting Perspective distortion:

Perspective distortion is usually noticeable when photographing with wide angle lenses and the lens needs to be tilted down or up from perfectly level. For example when taking a photograph of a building with a wide lens, you often get the appearance of the building falling backwards. While this can also be corrected with the lens correction filter used above, I feel there is a better way. Enter the Perspective Transform Tool.



Church in Vik, Iceland – vertical wall in center of the frame is vertical but the steeple is leaning due to wide angle perspective distortion

Open your photo and hit Ctrl A (Cmd A) to select the entire photo. Now go to Edit > Transform > Perspective. This will put handles at each corner of your photo and in the center of the horizontal and vertical lines. You can now drag the corners outward to correct the distortion. If the image seems to be tilting to one side or the other, simply grab the center handles and move them to straighten the image back out. When done just double click in the image.



Perspective Transform tool in action – corner handles pull out, center handle adjusts left/right

If your perspective correction was significant, this can have the effect of shortening your subject so at this point hit Ctrl T (Free Transform) and simply drag the center handle on the top of the image up a bit to correct for this.



Corrected image after slight free transform (Ctrl T) adjustment to restore proper height.

### **DuckShops – A New Delivery Model**

After 7 years of DuckShops I have decided to change the way they are delivered on a trial basis for the 2009/2010 Winter season. In recent years I have received an increasing number of requests for one on one in the field or classroom sessions rather than the group sessions that comprise the Workshop model of delivery. This Winter all DuckShops will be of the one on one variety (or two on one). In other words, this will be a private delivery model. Clients may schedule time in 4 hour time blocks for either classroom or field sessions. Clients will be able to make special requests for certain species. With just two people, a number of shooting locations become possible that aren't possible for larger groups and thereby making it possible to photograph some species that are not attainable with larger groups. More specific instruction, based on the client's specific needs, can be given using this delivery method in either the classroom or in the field. For more information please see the following link:

[http://www.ejphoto.com/duckshop\\_private.htm](http://www.ejphoto.com/duckshop_private.htm)



Lesser Scaup – Tempe, Arizona (D300, 200-400mm)

**Disclaimers:**

E.J. Peiker writes for and is supported by Singh-Ray Filters and receives non-monetary compensation from Singh-Ray Filters.

E.J. Peiker is a Wimberley Professional Services featured photographer and receives non-monetary compensation from Wimberley.

E.J. Peiker is a member of Nikon Professional Services and receives some free services from Nikon Corp.

E.J. Peiker is a founding partner in NatureScapes.net and receives non-monetary compensation from Naturescapes.net

Those that know me, know I would not endorse a product even for compensation if I did not feel it were a superior product.

**Legal Notice:** *Written and Photographic Content © E.J. Peiker, Nature Photographer. The text and photographs contained herein may not be copied or reproduced without written consent. This newsletter may be forwarded without restriction unaltered and in its entirety only.*