

QUACK

Newsletter of E.J. Peiker, Nature Photographer and www.EJPhoto.com
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Welcome to the quarterly newsletter from E.J. Peiker Nature Photography and www.EJPhoto.com. In this quarterly email publication, I will keep subscribers posted on upcoming workshops including the DuckShop 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. Please note that all content is copyrighted by E.J. Peiker. If you would like to be added or deleted to the mailing list or if you would like copies of past issues, just send me an email message at ejpeiker@cox.net. Back issues are available online at <http://www.ejphoto.com/newsletter.htm>



Brown Bear, Katmai National Park, Alaska (EOS 1D Mark II, 400mm)

E.J. Switches to Nikon???

After sending out the Namibia Special Edition, I received dozens of emails including some folks that were quite upset by what they perceived me as switching to Nikon. Have I switched? Well, not really

but I am now dual platform. A couple of months ago I acquired a D300 and the Nikon 200-400mm f/4 lens. I simply got tired of waiting for Canon to put out a competitive product in this range. My intention was to use this as my primary safari lens on the trip to Namibia while continuing to use the Canon gear for the landscape portion of that trip. However it became obvious that the weight of taking dual systems would make me go well over the 66lb limit for all baggage imposed by the small aircraft we would be traveling in so I purchased a D700 and a 17-35, 24-70 and 70-200 as well. I am now dual system for the time being. By the way, I am also dual system PC and Mac these days.



Sossusvlei, Namibia (D700, 70-200mm)

Canon EOS 5D Mark II vs. Nikon D700

Now that Canon has finally introduced the long awaited EOS 5D Mark II the comparisons to the D700 are already being made by those that have never used or possibly even seen either. The fanboy base on each side are digging in their heels claiming one is better than the other and the name calling has begun.

Since I now shoot with both the Nikon and the Canon system and in fact my entire Namibia trip was shot with a Nikon D300 for my crop sensor (i.e. wildlife) needs and a Nikon D700 for my full-frame (landscape) needs. I have also had the opportunity to test the 5D Mark II. For this reason I feel at least somewhat qualified to make a comparison between the two and there is no clear winner. Each camera has significant strengths and some weaknesses. My comparison is based on the kind of shooting I do with this type of camera which is purely nature photography – landscapes and wildlife. For bird photography, I would usually still opt for the Nikon D300 or Canon EOS 1D Mark II (or Mark III if you are convinced that the auto-focus really works right – I am not as only a small percentage of 1D Mark III's I've tried behave properly in AI Servo).

So let's dig in to the comparison! Price and form factor are approximately the same so there is no clear advantage here for either and they both target the same market.

Camera Body: Both camera bodies are primarily constructed of Magnesium alloy with weather sealing. The Canon body does still have a couple of plastic panels as part of its construction where the Nikon does not. Overall weather sealing on the Nikon is more extensive than the Canon. Slight advantage D700

Viewfinder Eyepoint Relief: If you photograph with eye glasses, this is an important measurement. In general, the larger the eyepoint relief value is, the easier it is to see the entire viewfinder for eyeglass wearers. The Canon has a 21mm eyepoint relief and the Nikon is only 18mm. When looking through the viewfinder this is immediately obvious if you are wearing glasses. The Canon viewfinder is completely visible at all times while one has to get the eye positioned just right to see the entire Nikon viewfinder. Advantage 5D Mark II.

Viewfinder Coverage: My single biggest peeve with the D700 is the viewfinder coverage. Nikon lists it at 95% but this seems very optimistic. In my estimation it is more like 92 or 93%. I wonder what the measurement technique for this is? There is a significant amount of the final image that you never see in the viewfinder with the D700 and this takes some getting used to. The 5D Mark II's specification is 98% and while this may also be a tad optimistic, the viewfinder coverage is clearly much better than the Nikon's. On the other hand, the Nikon viewfinder to my eyes is just a hair brighter and bigger. Advantage 5D Mark II.

Autofocus System: There is no comparison here. The D700 uses Nikon's full blown top of the line 51 point AF system with 15 cross type sensors while the Canon offering uses the same old amateur level 9 point system (with 6 invisible assist points) and only one cross type sensor. The acquisition rate, tracking rate, and accuracy is simply far superior on the Nikon. In addition, the area coverage of the AF sensors is far greater on the D700. The Canon gives up trying to AF if the maximum aperture is smaller than f/5.6 while the Nikon will attempt to autofocus with any aperture lens or lens teleconverters combination. Very large advantage to the D700.

Metering System: Again there is no contest on this one. Canon offers the old 35 point evaluative metering system while Nikon offers the top of the line 1005 point RGB meter. In practice I see a big difference between the two. The Canon system is famous for needing some level of compensation or adjustment to what the meter recommends on a majority of shots. In addition, the Nikon meter lets you fine tune if additional weight is to be placed in the center or not. I was stunned how rare an adjustment needs to be made to the meter's recommendation with the Nikon system and even when I did have to make one, it was never more than 1/3 stop. Under the same situations, shooting side by side, the Canon system sometimes needs as much as – 1 1/3 stop change to what the meter recommends. So not only is the D700's metering system superior, it's auto exposure accuracy is also far superior. Large advantage to the D700.

Flash Metering System: Again Nikon's metering system simply gets it right most of the time, Canon's system requires significant negative compensation outdoors and significant positive compensation indoors to get proper exposure using the TTL systems. Advantage D700.

Flash Sync Speed: I do not understand why Canon left the fastest flash sync speed (not including high speed sync) at 1/200 second while the competition is generally 1/250 or even faster. The D700 has a fastest sync speed of 1/320. This is especially important in outdoor flash photography. Advantage D700.

Exposure Compensation Range and Autobracketing Range – Nikon is up to 5 stops in either direction, Canon is 2 stops. No comparison here – advantage D700.

Auto White Balance Accuracy. As has always been the case, both systems are horrible outside of about 4000K to 6500K rendering incandescent lighting way too orange and shadows way too blue. Neither system is better than the other in the range outside of 4000 to 6500 degrees Kelvin. However within the 4000-6500 range, I find the Nikon system to require less adjustment but both still need some adjustment on virtually every frame. Advantage – none.

Frames Per Second – The D700 without grip is 5 frames per second and with the optional vertical grip can shoot at nearly 8 frames per second. The EOS 5D Mark II shoots at 3.9 frames per second regardless of whether the grip is attached or not. Advantage D700.

Shutter Lag – The 5D continues to have an uncompetitive shutter lag compared to any camera on the market at this price point at about 75 milliseconds. The D700 by comparison is about 50ms. Does this matter? Absolutely it does when shooting action. Advantage D700.

ISO Range - Both cameras can shoot up to ISO 25,600 and both cameras produce absolutely awful files there. The Canon camera's standard low ISO is 100 with an extended setting to 50 while Nikon's standard low ISO setting is 200 with extended range down to 100. Both cameras lose a significant amount of dynamic range due to highlight clipping when the optional low ISO setting is used and therefore both cameras should only be used in low contrast scenes at such low ISO's. I find that I often like a slow shutter speed and the Canon allows that with fewer compromises due to the standard ISO 100 setting. Advantage 5D Mark II.

Image review LCD – both cameras use the same VGA resolution LCD but Canon adds auto brightening and dimming which is a nice feature to have. Slight advantage 5D Mark II

Built in Flash – the D700 has one, the 5D Mark II doesn't and the D700's weatherproofing does not appear to be compromised by it. Advantage D700. This came in handy when discovering a gecko in the red sands in Namibia but he was backlit. I simply popped up the flash and filled in the shadowed side nicely. Something I would not have been able to get a good shot of with the 5D mark II.

Mirror Lock-up – The D700 has a dial position for it. The Canon still requires going through the menus to get to it. One of the Canon's user customizable functions can be programmed for MLU but it should just be a standard setting. Advantage D700.

Megapixels – Well I've waited long enough to write about megapixels. The Canon has 21 million pixels while the Nikon has 12 million. So immediately you have to give the advantage to the 5D Mark II. But not so fast... The true resolution difference is nothing like the 75% difference in raw pixels. With the 5D Mark II, you give up some of the resolution due to diffraction effects relative to the D700. This wipes out about half of that 75% increase in my experience. Additionally, the noise is a bit higher at ISO 800 and above on the 5D (assuming all detail robbing noise reduction is turned off). So while in the end, the advantage is still with the 5D Mark II unless you specialize in low light photography, the difference is nothing like what one would expect.

Those are the big ones but there are other important comparisons to be made which I have outlined below.



Elephant Battle – Etosha, Namibia (D300, 200-400mm)

Items in favor of the Canon 5D mark II:

- Menu Structure. Canon's menu structure is a very logical structure that generally places the most used functions in the easiest places to access. Nikon's on the other hand, while on the surface seems organized into 5 categories, is a complete mess under the surface. You find things that are custom functions that shouldn't be and things that aren't that should be. Items in the different sub-menus are haphazardly arranged with important, often used functions at the bottom of menus and items you might set once and never return to at the top of menus. It seems that Nikon simply adds stuff to menus with no regard for menu arrangement – a serious overhaul is needed here. Fortunately there is a user customizable menu page that can simplify this some.
- Video. While many on forums have poo-pooed adding video capability to DSLR cameras, I don't understand why they are so offended. It's an additional tool which you can use... or not. Canon has gone into video strong with full 1080P HD video capability for up to 12 minutes. Couple this with the excellent lenses available and you have a fairly capable HD video camera. The one thing I do not understand is why Canon chose to cripple the HDMI output and not have the audio from film clips available from it. The beauty of HDMI is that it is a single high quality interface for video and audio. In any case, the D700 has no video capability.
- MLU/Timer Sync. Canon allows the 2 second timer and Mirror lock-up to be used in conjunction with each other. Nikon only provides a programmable 1 second delay between mirror up and exposure. 1 second is not enough to stabilize the camera.
- The optional grip for the 5D Mark II accepts 2 batteries. The Nikon optional grip only accepts one battery and a second battery goes into the camera itself. So if you want to charge both batteries you have to remove the grip on the D700. This is a pain.

Items in favor of the Nikon D700:

- Histogram. As I have harped for years, the single most important piece of information on the camera's rear LCD is the exposure histogram. Canon continues to offer only the small, difficult to properly see and interpret luminance and RGB histograms. While Nikon offers these as well, one can customize the center button to display a full screen histogram overlay over the

image. This is incredibly useful and the frame of the histogram is a different color than the histogram itself making it very easy to see when over or underexposure has occurred.

- CF Customizability. The D700 allows the camera to be customized in many more ways than the 5D mark II and in fact much more customizable than even the EOS 1Ds Mark III. While this is generally a minor consideration, more options equals more adaptability to various user styles.
- Virtual Horizon. At first I thought it was a gimmick but it has ended up being a very useful tool. On the D700 one can bring up a level on the rear LCD and when it is level, the color of the horizon changes to green. This is very useful and when coupled with the in viewfinder grid, makes it almost impossible to take an out of level shot unless you are ignoring these tools. One of the buttons on the body can also be programmed to put a level in the viewfinder – this is extremely useful.

No discussion of two camera bodies would be complete without a few words about image quality. Both cameras can obviously produce stunning photographs of the highest caliber and both can produce stunning 16x24 photographs (judging from my Epson 3800). A lot of the image quality discussion revolves around lenses and the discussion becomes a system discussion rather than a camera body discussion. Here, in brief are my findings of the lenses on these bodies:

Canon EF 16-35mm f/2.8L Mark II vs. Nikon AF-S 17-35mm f/2.8. It's a wash, both give similar image quality. The Nikon 17-35, being a 12 year old design holds up remarkably well to the newly designed Canon 16-35 II

Canon 24-70 f/2.8L vs. Nikon AF-S 24-70 f/2.8. The Nikon is the better lens at wide angles with better corner sharpness and less chromatic aberration. The Canon is very slightly better for linear distortions.

Canon 70-200 f/2.8L IS vs. Nikon AF-S 70-200 f/2.8 VR. The Canon is significantly superior – in fact I wouldn't even put them in the same league and Canon's 70-200 f/4 beats the pants off of the Nikon 70-200 f/2.8 as well. It is obvious that the Nikon was not designed with full frame sensors in mind with serious vignetting even at f/11 and some corner softness on a full frame sensor. The VR is unusable on a tripod as well on this lens. For the money, this Nikon lens is probably the most disappointing lens I have ever used from Nikon. I base this on three different samples.

In conclusion, the fanboys are wrong – no surprise there. Neither camera is superior to the other. Both have their strengths and weakness as the rational among us probably expected. Both are excellent choices with one or the other better depending on your needs. If you need a maximum number of pixels, then the 5D Mark II is the better choice. If you need a supremely flexible and customizable body with world leading high ISO performance and a true professional body, then the D700 is an excellent choice. Hopefully the comparisons above will allow some of my readers to make the intelligent choice for them. I have purposely not discussed ergonomics other than Nikon's menu structure because either can be adopted to easily by most people. For now, I am shooting with both systems and have the best of both worlds.

Other New Stuff

Gura Gear. Friend and fellow photographer Andy Biggs is introducing his Gura Gear line of photographic backpacks. These are especially designed for the traveler facing severe weight restrictions and the safari shooter. The materials on these backpacks are space age, ultra light and ultra strong resulting in a full featured backpack with substantial harness that weighs only 4 pounds. I recently took a first production run sample as my bag for my gear to Washington and then to Namibia

and it performed flawlessly. The 4lb backpack was loaded down with a D300+grip, D700, 200-400, 70-200, 24-70, 17-35, 18-200, SB900 flash, and accessories – a total weight of 33lb. The 4lb bag carried all of this with ease and I had no issue in any airport check-in line. Check out GuraGear.com for more information. The bags should be available to the public within a couple of weeks.

4th Generation Design Mongoose Gimbal Mount. I used a borrowed Mongoose M3.5a for the first time on my trip to Namibia with the Nikon 200-400mm lens. This is an excellent alternative to the Wimberley head for midsized lenses up to about the 200-400 Nikon lens. I loved its operation and smoothness. A major benefit is that it weighs in at only about 2 lb and is a sturdy gimbal type head. I can't think of a better companion to the Nikon 200-400 than this and I purchased my own soon after returning home. It is manufactured by 4th Generation systems and sold by them and also through the NatureScapes.Net store. They also make a smaller one that is ideal for lenses such as 400 f/5.6 or the Canon 100-400, Nikon 80-400 sized lenses.



Walrus – The Aleutians (EOS 1D Mark IIIn, 500mm)

Iceland, Alaska, North Cascades, and Namibia

As another busy summer shooting season comes to an end, I was blessed to be able to photograph three spectacular places this summer. The last issue of Quack outlined the trip to Iceland. Images from that trip can be seen here: http://www.ejphoto.com/iceland_page.htm and the last issue of Quack, if you missed it can be read here:

<http://www.ejphoto.com/Quack%20PDF/Quack%20Summer%202008.pdf>

Over the 4th of July weekend, friend Jim McDonald and I traveled to Katmain National Park to camp and photograph Brown Bear. We also chartered a private flight about 300 miles down the Aleutians where we photographed approximately 3000 Walrus!

http://www.ejphoto.com/brown_bear_page.htm

http://www.ejphoto.com/walrus_page.htm

In mid summer, I took a weekend trip to North cascades National Park. The weather wasn't ideal but I still came away with some very nice images of this oft forgotten National Park on the Canadian border between Washington and British Columbia, Canada. Images can be found here: http://www.ejphoto.com/north_cascades_national_park_pag.htm



North Cascades National Park (EOS 1Ds Mark II, 24-70mm)

At the end of summer I visited the country of Namibia on the southwest section of Africa. A special supplemental edition of quack diaried the trip: <http://www.ejphoto.com/Quack%20PDF/Namibia%202008%20Diary.pdf> and additional images can be found here: http://www.ejphoto.com/namibia_page.htm

Photoshop Tip of the Quarter

The Photoshop Tip of the quarter this time is another one that will help speed your work in Bridge and Camera Raw. Let's say you have already done a RAW conversion on a file but there are others that you wish to convert with the same develop settings. Perhaps they were shot at the same time under the same lighting conditions. Well there is no need to individually make the adjustments to each image. Simply do this in Bridge:

Right click on the image you have already made RAW adjustments to
Select > Develop Settings
Click > Copy Settings

Now select all of the other images that you wish to apply the same RAW adjustment settings to and
Right click again
Select > Develop Settings
Click > Paste Settings

A dialog will pop up – the defaults, which is most of the boxes checked, are usually exactly what you want. What is actually happening here is that Photoshop is simply making a copy of the sidecar XMP file and giving it the name of the additional images. This tip can save you a ton of time especially if you are later going back to a series of shots where you want to convert additional frames.

Another trick is that you can click on Develop Settings and Select Previous Conversion to use the same settings you used for the last RAW conversion.

DuckShop 2009

There are still one or two opening for each of this winter's DuckShops at this writing. If interested, please don't wait to sign up. Details can be found here: <http://www.ejphoto.com/Duckshops.htm>



Green-winged Teal – Orange County, California (EOS 1D Mark II, 500mm, 1.4x)

NatureScapes Photography Series

I will be a guest speaker at the NatureScapes Photography Series being held in Socorro New Mexico on December 5-7. In addition I will lead two in the field photo shoots. It promises to be a great event with some excellent speakers and an opportunity for folks to get out and shoot at the world famous

Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge. Everything you need to know can be found in the following link:

<http://www.naturescapes.net/docs/index.php/events>

I hope to see you there!

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