

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 Photographer and 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. Back issues are available online at <http://www.ejphoto.com/newsletter.htm>



African Lion - South Africa (D300, 200-400mm)

Summer Travel

The Summer of 2010 was definitely the summer of photo travel. I went on several trips and did an unprecedented amount of photography. Here is a summary:

Barrow, Alaska:

June 2010 – Barrow, Alaska: In mid June I went to Barrow Alaska on a Matthew Studebaker and Brian Zwiebel led expedition to the northernmost point in the USA – Barrow Alaska. Barrow sits on the shores of the Arctic Ocean at 71.2 degrees North latitude so it is about 5 degrees and 300 miles above the Arctic circle. The nearest tree is also about 300 miles south. Barrow has approximately 80 days a year where the sun doesn't rise and about 60 days where it doesn't set it. Since I was there in mid June, the sun never even got close to setting. The weather was a wintry mix of sun, fog, and sleety mist. Why Barrow? Barrow is the only reasonably accessible place on Earth where you can photograph all three Arctic species of Eider – King Eider, Spectacled Eider, and Steller's Eider. Spectacled and, Steller's Eider were two of the remaining three species of North American Ducks that I did not have in my files (the other is Masked Duck). I am happy to report that I photographed all three species of Eider in their natural tundra habitat but it was much more difficult than I imagined. These ducks, as is most everything in Alaska, are ruthlessly hunted making them extremely wary of people. Many hours of crawling through tundra muck and standing in freezing pools of water up to my chest resulted in some very satisfying photos. I wore chest waders pretty much all waking hours for the 8 days I spent in Barrow. Along the way about 28 species of birds were photographed, many being shorebirds in the height of breeding plumage which is just not seen in the lower 48 states.



Steller's Eider - Barrow Alaska (D300, 500mm)

Since the sun does not set in Barrow for most of the summer, the best light, when it isn't fogged in, is from about 9:00PM to about 10:00AM but most nights an icy fog develops. We generally photographed from about 4:00AM to about 11:00AM and then again from about 3:00PM until 11:00PM but this was highly variable based on the very fast and constantly changing weather. Winds at 20 to 40MPH from

the East make it an even bigger challenge, especially in the afternoon when the wind is blowing towards the sun. Bird photography works best when the wind is blowing from the sun's direction rather than towards it since birds, like airplanes take off and land into the wind. If you don't want to shoot birds from behind, it is best when the wind and sun are coming from the same direction. Despite this, we still came away with many great photos in the afternoons. Upon first arrival, much of the land was completely covered by snow and birds were scurrying around waiting for the nesting grounds, the tundra, to open up. The change from day to day was simply amazing. By the third day, much of the tundra was under water from melting snow and by the fifth day, most of the tundra was marshy but plenty of land was available and the birds get very busy laying eggs and nesting. The Arctic summer is short so the birds have to get going right away. This led to seeing and photographing lots of mating displays.

Barrow is a fantastic bird photography destination but know that you will have to work very hard in harsh conditions but the results are very well worth it.

Northwest Wyoming:

July 2010: One week after returning from Barrow, my significant other and photographic sidekick Mary and I departed for Northwest Wyoming to photograph Wild Horses. The plan was to also spend some time in Yellowstone if we were able to locate the horses early on in the trip. Our flights got into Cody, WY around 11:00AM so it was too soon to check into our hotel so we turned toward the McCullough Wild Horse Management Area on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands to see if we could locate them. Driving out US 14, it wasn't long before we spotted wild horses on the horizon. We started photographing them despite the bad light because it is never certain if we would find them again later. Fortunately, we had great luck in finding Wild Horses every time out in both the McCullough WHMA and the Pryor Mountain WHMA. It was great watching and photographing their behavior and seeing how these wild horses raise their young and prepare them for the harshness of living in the wild. Since finding the horses was relatively easy, this also left time for two forays in Yellowstone where we photographed some of the iconic sights there such as Grand Prismatic Spring, Upper and Lower Yellowstone Falls, and Pilot Peak. We also photographed Moose, Bison, Grizzly Bear, among others. Weather was great throughout and the trip was a great success.

Canadian Rockies:

July 2010: Just two days after returning from Wyoming, I was off to Calgary and the Canadian Rockies to spend a week photographing there with long-time friend and NatureScapes.net cofounder Greg Downing. We spent about half the time in Banff and half the time in Jasper and



Wild Mustangs - Wyoming (D300, 200-400mm)

photographed many of the famous spots but also found some areas that have not been overly photographed. Wildlife was abundant throughout both parks.



Pyramid Peak at Patricia Lake - Jasper National Park, Alberta (D3x, 24-70mm)

Areas in Banff such as Vermilion Lakes, Moraine Lake, Lake Louise, Peyto Lake, Waterfowl Lakes, and Herbert Lakes were as spectacular as ever and we had great light in most cases. We even photographed a Loon pair with a very young chick on Herbert Lake until the masses arrived and pushed them to the other side of the lake.

While on the Continental Divide we found a particularly beautiful 14 point Bull Elk that cooperated for some great photos. Similarly in Jasper, we came across an unusually beautiful Big-horn Ram for this time of year and also some baby Big-horns.

I have often said that the Canadian Rockies are the most beautiful area in North America and nothing about this trip changed my mind from this viewpoint.

Southern Africa:

August 2010: At the beginning of August, I packed my bags once again and headed for Johannesburg, South Africa to meet up with long time friend Andy Biggs and new friend James Weis (Co-owner of Eyes On Africa Travel & Safaris) to co-lead Andy's African Safari Boot Camp. This was a wildlife Safari in Botswana and South Africa with the intent of teaching field technique, photographic technique, and image processing technique to those attending.

Our itinerary called for 8 game drives in the Mashatu Game Reserve in Eastern Botswana and 8 game drives in the MalaMala Game Reserve in Northeastern South Africa. After suffering through the long 17 hour flight from Atlanta to Johannesburg and an overnight stay in Johannesburg, we boarded our

Beech 1900C private charter to Botswana. The Beech 1900 was ten times more comfortable than Delta's 777.

The Mashatu Game Reserve, attached to Mapungubwe National Park in the Tuli Reserve is one of the best places on earth for Elephants. The Elephant encounters here can be very close and are numerous. It also has Lion and Leopard along with a number of Antelope species including the shy Eland. The Mashatu main Camp offered first rate lodging with great food and exceptional rangers, many of which have worked there for 20 years. While there we only had one Leopard encounter that wasn't very photographable, we did see a number of Lions including some cubs and of course many Elephant. The Elephant experience is especially memorable with Elephants all around our vehicle within touching distance.



African Elephant - Botswana (D300, 70-200mm)

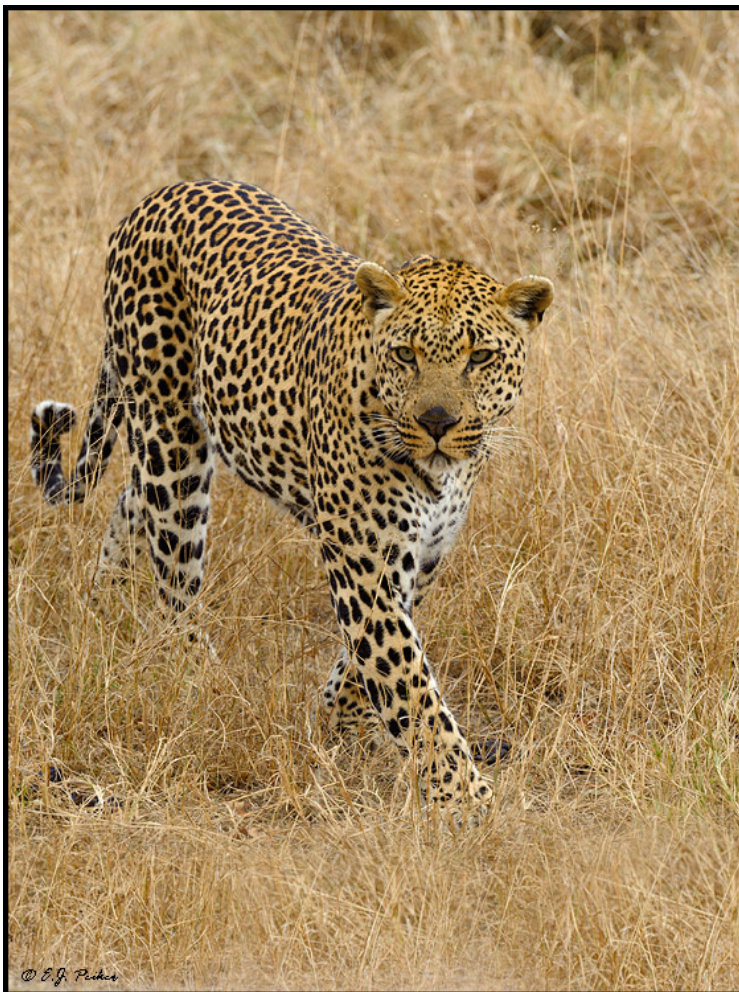
Mashatu is also outstanding for southern Africa birds and I am contemplating a bird trip there in the future just for bird photography. I photographed numerous species but the most fun was a White-fronted Bee-eater colony which exhibited awesome group behavior and gave many photographic opportunities.

After 5 days and 4 nights there, we again flew a private charter back to South Africa. A stop on Polokwane to immigrate followed by another short flight to MalaMala, the site of the second half of our Photo Safari. MalaMala shares the western border of Kruger national Park and allows close-up photography of Africa's Big 5 – Cape Buffalo, Southern White Rhinoceros, African Elephant, African Lion, and Leopard. Both Ratray's Camp and MalaMala Main Camp offer luxurious accommodations with outstanding food.

My personal mission was to photograph Leopard which I failed to do during my previous two visits to Africa. And did I photograph Leopard? 1400 of the 2700 frames I took in South Africa were of Leopards!!! One morning, we photographed two females, one cub and the dominant male in MalaMala

all before breakfast. Two were on kills in trees! One of the leopards with an Impala in a tree allowed great shooting for about 6 hours.

Another memorable morning was what I'll call our Lion morning. It started out with two females lounging in a grass field. A young male, trying to sow his oats approached them but they were uninterested so he went on his merry way and encountered a herd of Impala. After an uninspired and half hearted attempt to kill an Impala, this young male continued on and came to rest atop a hill. We were waiting for another vehicle to arrive so that we could move on without losing the Lion when a large dominant male came running over the hill chasing the young male. We thought for a second that they were going to come right through our vehicle but they split the vehicle with one going around the front



Leopard - South Africa (D700, 70-200mm)

and the other around the back. They finally confronted each other head to head and then the younger one decided discretion is the better part of valor and ran off. The dominant male then walked back to the top of the hill for about 1km and finally laid down. Again, we were waiting to rotate out so that another vehicle could photograph the male when the two females from earlier arrived. One rolled around in front of the male presenting herself. She then led him about 1km to the site of her choosing where we observed them copulate twice. This whole scenario covered a couple of kilometers and carried out over about 2.5 hours – quite a morning game drive!

Overall, Mashatu and MalaMala were awesome! Somebody once told me a long time ago that you only need to go to Africa once and it will be in your blood forever. Truer words were never spoken. I just keep wanting to go back.

Making Photoshop's Automated Features Work For You

Photoshop has a number of preset automated features for quick photo adjustment. Most photographers avoid these like the plague because they rarely

give a desirable affect. However, if the presets are simply tweaked and adjusted, these tools can be a major time saver. Let's take a look at three such commands and adjust their automated presets. I think you will find that these will speed up your workflow.

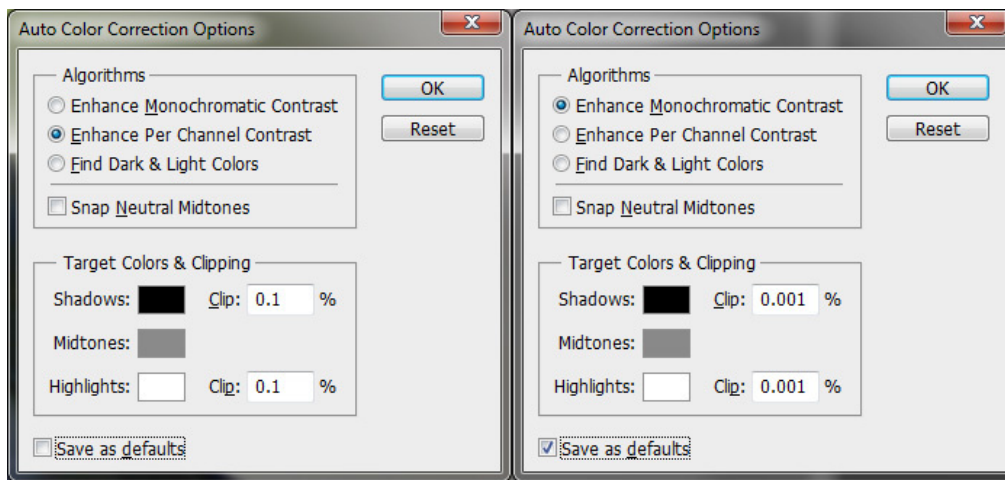
Levels Command (Ctrl/Cmd L), Curves Command (Ctrl/Cmd M):

Levels and Curves have an Auto button, however using it usually leads to an overly contrasty and garishly colored result. As such, most people stop using it after the first attempt and make these

adjustments manually. However the default behavior of the auto button can be changed to easily and automatically adjust the image for black and white points with a single click.

In default mode, the auto button adjusts the black and white point individually for each color channel when the Auto Button is clicked in Levels or Curves (or in a Levels or Curves Adjustment Layer). Since the amount of shift required for each color may be different, this can cause undesired color shifts. Additionally, the clipping point defaults in Photoshop throw away too much highlight and shadow detail leaving the image too contrasty and discarding shadow detail.

We can easily change this behavior. Simply change the defaults from the Photoshop Defaults on the left below, to the new defaults and save them as indicated on the right below by going to Levels (Ctrl/Cmd L) and clicking on the Options button. This will bring up the dialog box below. Make the changes and check the "Save as defaults" box:

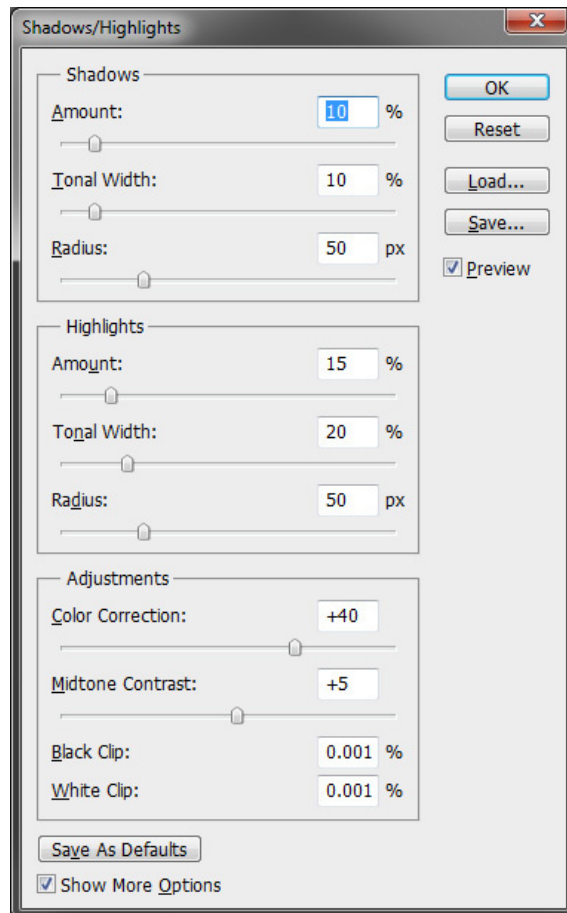


By selecting the Enhance Monochromatic Contrast Button, all color channels will now be adjusted by the same amount and by changing the clipping levels, you will no longer throw away important highlight and shadow detail. Henceforth, creating a Levels or Curves adjustment layer or by simply clicking Ctrl/Cmd L or Ctrl/Cmd M and clicking on the Auto button, Photoshop will properly adjust the image so that the brightest pixel on the image is white and the darkest is black. I wouldn't suggest this for low contrast scenes like fog which you want to keep low contrast, but for almost all other images, this is an excellent and easy way to set white and black points.

Shadow/Highlight Command:

For starters, I have assigned Ctrl/Cmd H as my keyboard shortcut for the Shadow/Highlight Command. The Photoshop default for Ctrl/Cmd H is something I don't use so this is not a problem. You can leave it be and always use this function from the pull down menu or change it to anything you want.

Similar to the automated Levels and Curves adjustment, the default Shadow/Highlight Adjustment settings in Photoshop rarely give you a pleasing result. I have set-up new defaults that work well the majority of the time and get you close almost all of the time with just slight further adjustment required. The first to getting more pleasing results is to click on the Show more options button at the bottom. Next adjust your settings as indicated below and make sure to hit the Save As Defaults button at the bottom:



The adjustments above give a modest amount of shadow recovery and uses a large radius so that halving is not a factor. If you need to make shadows brighter, simply adjust the Shadow Amount slider to 20% and if you want a wider range of shadows to be brightened, adjust the tonal width to 20%. It is rare that more adjustment than this is needed and the radius setting of 50 should work well 99% of the time.

The highlight adjustment is trickier and more tweaking of these settings is often required to prevent halving of the sky around a dark area. Experiment with this but these are a good starting point.

In the next issue, we will explore how best to set-up Adobe Camera Raw (and Lightroom) defaults to minimize your workload.

Quick Tip

Traveling to the very dusty African continent reminded me of a tip that I often tell my workshop participants but haven't written here in some time. Whenever you return from a very dusty place, take all of your lens (front and rear) and body caps and throw them in the dishwasher and run a light wash or quick rinse cycle on them. This clears dust out of the nooks and crannies which inevitably find their ways right onto your sensor. Also, if you use neoprene covers for your equipment from LensCoat or OpTech, it's a good idea to throw those in the washing machine and run a low temperature delicate cycle and then dry them on the lowest temperature on your dryer. Just make sure everything is good

and dry before you let it touch your camera gear again. Even if you aren't going to really dusty areas, it's a good idea to wash the lens and body caps every few months.



Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep (D300, 200-400mm)

Kauai By Land Sea And Air

Greg Downing and I, cofounders of the worlds largest online Nature Photography resource, are happy to announce the creation of NatureScapes Certified Workshops. NatureScapes Certified Workshops are designed to take you to some of the best places in the world and to teach you how to make technically excellent images with an artistic flair.

Our pledge to you is to live up to the NatureScapes reputation and to offer the best workshop experience with the most talented leaders in the industry. Our instructors and leaders are not only passionate about photography, but also equally passionate about teaching and sharing their photographic knowledge and life experiences with you. We only offer workshops run by instructors who possess unwavering patience, determination and good humor to ensure an educational and enjoyable photographic adventure for everyone in attendance! As professional photography workshop instructors, photography leaders and mentors we pledge the following to all of our workshop attendees.

- To provide the best possible experience for you based on your individual needs and goals with each and every workshop, whether you are a first timer or a repeat attendee.
- To lead, befriend and teach in a non-confrontational, non-egotistical and approachable fashion.
- To be good “people” persons - especially when it comes to managing small groups with varying interests, skills, needs and personalities.
- To inspire creativity and share our technical knowledge without waver and to put the importance of your photography endeavors above ours as leaders.

- To be prompt, ethical and trustworthy and to instill responsible photography with minimal impact to the planet.

Join Greg and me in Kauai in April 2011 for a once in a lifetime workshop that covers the entire island of Kauai. We will photographically explore it by land and take you to some of the most spectacular views on earth. We will explore it by air in private helicopter charters flown without doors (don't worry, you are full secured with a four point harness) to give you completely unobstructed and simply amazing views of this gorgeous island. We will explore it by sea as we take a boat along the incredible Napali coast. Much more information including a full itinerary along with other workshops can be found here: www.naturescapes.net/docs/index.php/workshops



Napali Coast (Eos 1Ds Mark II, 24-70mm)

Facebook Page

On my Facebook Fan Page, I am keeping those interested up to date on what photo excursions I go on as well as short commentaries on a variety of photo related subjects and tools. I also have a number of galleries accessible through there. Please visit:

www.facebook.com/pages/EJ-Peiker-Nature-Photographer/150804446733

and if you like what you see, please click the "Like" button.

Private Photography Instruction

In addition to the successful private DuckShops which I launched last winter after many years of group instruction workshops, I am now also offering private instruction in Wildlife and Landscape photography at the place of your choosing within the USA and Canada. All DuckShops and private Workshops will be of the one on one variety (or two on one). Clients may schedule time in 4 hour time blocks for either

classroom or field sessions. 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 or locations 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

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Notice:

EJPhoto will be closed November 30 - December 14, 2010. All orders and inquiries will be processed in the order in which they were received.

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MalaMala Sunset - South Africa (GF-1, 14-45mm)