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Newsletter of E.J. Peiker, Nature Photographer and [www.EJPhoto.com](http://www.EJPhoto.com)  
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Welcome to the quarterly newsletter from E.J. Peiker, Nature Photographer and [www.EJPhoto.com](http://www.EJPhoto.com). In this quarterly email publication, I will keep subscribers posted on upcoming workshops 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>



Granite Dells - Watson Lake, Arizona (D3x, 24-70mm)

The second half of 2011 has brought us a slew of new news and photography equipment. Every major manufacturer of camera gear has introduced new and often interesting products. In this newsletter, I will provide my thoughts on each of the major camera companies and their new gear.

**Canon:** The big news in the Canon world is the recent announcement of the EOS 1D X. The 1DX represents a merging of the two high end professional cameras, the EOS 1D line and the EOS 1Ds line. Despite having some very impressive specs with 12 frames per second in RAW mode and 14 frames per second in JPEG mode on a full frame sensor camera, a new more sensitive autofocus system, and promised improvement in noise from one to two stops (RAW and JPEG), owners of both the 1Ds and the 1D are feeling somewhat unsatisfied as there is a significant loss for both camps. The EOS 1D Mark IV photographer loses the perceived reach of the 1.3x crop factor and if he crops the full frame to the same dimensions as the 1D4, only 11 megapixels remain. This results in a drop from 16 megapixels to 11 megapixels if the same shot were taken from the same location with the same lens and then cropped with the 1DX. The 1Ds Mark III photographer loses about 3 megapixels for the equivalent full-frame shot. Additionally, Auto-focus with an f/8 optic is lost. So, even though there are many things to love about the 1DX, photographers considering an upgrade to the new model must give up something that they currently have. Of course, as is the case with every new model, video capabilities are significantly enhanced. Many feel that Canon has emphasized development of video capability in DSLRs over development of still photo capabilities. Virtually every Canon interview, press release or advertisement spends more time on video capabilities than it does on still photography. In addition to the EOS 1D X, Canon also announce the development of an EOS DSLR specifically for video and a line of lenses. One could easily interpret that Canon's high end development muscle has largely gone towards the videographer.



Acadia National Park, Maine (D3x, 24-70mm)



As of this writing, the much anticipated EOS 5D Mark III and a successor to the EOS 7D have not been announced. On the lens front, no new lenses have recently been announced and the ones that were announced a year ago, for the most part, are still not shipping. Over the past year, Canon has announced a complete revamping of its super telephotos and the new 200-400mm f/4L with built in 1.4x teleconverter making it essentially a 200-560mm f/4-5.6L. At this time, only the 300mm f/2.8L and 400mm f/2.8L are shipping in limited quantities. The 500mm f/4L and 600mm f/4L have been delayed multiple times and are now not expected until the second quarter of 2012. Meanwhile, the 200-400 f/4L seems to slip one month every month with no real and believable delivery date. Many of the delays are still related to the horrific earthquake followed by Tsunami and nuclear disaster in Japan but some, especially the 200-400mm are also related to production complexities and difficulties.

Finally, Canon is the only major manufacturer that does not yet have an interchangeable lens mirrorless system. They are late to the game in this regard and grossly underestimated the demand for high quality, compact, interchangeable lens cameras. Panasonic, Olympus, Sony, and Nikon are really hurting Canon here as this is the largest growing segment of the camera industry currently, especially in Asia.



Moose, Baxter State Park, Maine (D3x, 500mm)

**Fujifilm:** Fuji is making somewhat of a resurgence. The X100, fixed lens mirrorless camera with an APS-C sensor has been very popular for the small market niche that it fits in. It incorporates a novel and unique hybrid viewfinder that allows the photographer to switch between an electronic viewfinder (EVF) and an optical one so the photographer has all of the great information that an EVF can bring and the clarity of an optical viewfinder all in the same

camera. Fuji did stumble on the initial introduction of this camera due to an almost unimaginably poor user interface design. Then the Japan earthquake wiped out production and availability became nearly non-existent. This manufacturing delay allowed Fuji to focus on fixing the user interface and it is now largely a non-issue. The lack of interchangeable lenses on this camera does limit its appeal, however, it now appears that Fuji is developing an interchangeable lens version of this camera. Whether or not Fuji is able to also develop a lens system that is up to the standard of the X100 and deliver them remains to be seen.



Acadia National Park, Maine (D3x, 24-70mm)

Fuji also introduced a compact version of this camera called the X10 with a compact sensor of a novel design that uses a different color array than the standard Bayer sensor pattern. It allows switching from its standard 12 megapixels to a lower resolution, higher dynamic range pattern 6 megapixel mode. The camera also does not have the hybrid viewfinder. Just as I was finishing writing this newsletter, Fuji announced a new X-S1 super point and shoot featuring a 4x crop sensor and a 24-624mm (35mm equivalent) lens!!!

It is clear that Fuji aims to stake out a middle ground between DSLRs and high end compacts that offer DSLR like image quality using some new technologies. Keep an eye on Fuji in this segment. Hopefully they have learned from the user interface firmware design debacle of the X100.

**Kodak:** I debated whether to even include Kodak or not in this write-up since they do not manufacture a camera that appeals to my audience. However Kodak does manufacture the sensors in the medium format Pentax 645D and Leica S2. Kodak has recently sold this part of its business to a venture capital

firm. Such firms generally do not go into the business of the companies or assets they bought but rather split them off and sell the pieces. This has owners of the Pentax 645D and Leica S2 a bit on edge. We do not know at this time what, if any, ramifications on these two camera systems this has but we will have to keep a careful eye on it. These two systems offer extremely high image quality and a significant investment for the owners of those systems.



**Leica:** The venerable German camera company Leica still makes some of the most desirable camera gear on Earth. They also make some of the least affordable camera gear on Earth. 2011 was not a big year for new camera introductions but a slightly upscale version of the M9 full frame range finder, the M9-P, was introduced and the Leica S lens system continued its build out. The M9-P is without question the best range finder type camera available anywhere but for the same price you can get a Nikon D3x which is higher resolution, has a much more complete lens and support system, and equivalent or better image quality as long as it is used with Nikon's professional grade lenses. But then owning Leica has always been more about the prestige and the incredible quality feel of the brand. It's similar to Corvette vs. Ferrari. The fastest Corvettes are every bit as fast as Ferraris costing 3 to 4 times as much. But for those that can afford it, they want the Ferrari.

The Leica S2, the company's medium format DSLR system, is an incredible camera offering first rate image quality and excellent lenses. It is however also incredibly expensive with a camera body and three lenses costing close to \$50K. The Pentax 645D uses the same imaging chip for less than half the price with lenses of similar focal length - if those lenses were available (see Pentax). Both Leica and Pentax use the Kodak medium format CCD imaging sensor which was just sold to a venture capital group. This has left many prospective owners of this camera nervous about buying into a system that may lose its sensor supply. Time will tell. I am optimistic that the sensor will live on under a different name or some other manufacturer's sensor may be incorporated in future models.

**Nikon:** Nikon has had a tough year; tougher than any of the other camera manufacturers. Nikon's professional camera plant is in Sendai, Japan - the city hit hardest by the Tsunami. Most of the horrific footage of the tsunami and its aftermath were from Sendai. While the plant itself did not get swept away, the infrastructure around it, and its employees homes, and lives were swept away. Nikon's consumer camera plant is in the flood stricken area of Thailand and is sitting under about 8 feet of water as I write this in November. Both of these natural disasters completely stopped production. By late fall 2011



Granite Dells, Watson Lake, Arizona (D3x, 24-70mm)

the pro camera plant in Sendai was up and running although not at its previous capacity and the plant in Thailand was not expected to be back in full production until the second quarter of 2012. These two disasters have deeply wounded Nikon and has caused them significant market share loss as no other camera company was hit harder. Nikon was not able to introduce the successor to the D3s professional camera and the high end consumer D300 and D700 cannot be produced. They are now 4 years old which is a relic in the digital camera world. Thankfully, both cameras were so good at their introduction that they are still very viable tools even when compared to newer cameras. But availability is virtually nonexistent. Nikon also is having difficulty supplying it's lower end DSLRs including the newer D3100 and D5100 and the very capable D7000. And this all from a company that has always had problems meeting user demand due to always underestimating demand and manufacturing needs to begin with. The Nikon user base is eagerly awaiting Nikon's next generation and also eagerly awaiting availability for many of its products.

The only real good news for Nikon in 2011 is the introduction and acceptance of its Chinese made J1 and V1 mirrorless cameras. Nikon uses a smaller sensor than the other mirrorless camera manufacturers. The sensor is a 10 megapixel 2.7x crop factor chip compared to a full 35mm frame chip. Nikon received a lot of criticism when it announced a new mirrorless line with a sensor that is so much smaller than other company's sensors, however, now that the cameras are out and being rigorously tested, the image quality and noise levels are quite good and the cameras are definitely taking off (despite the exceedingly ugly hot pink version that will clearly not sell outside of Japan). Additionally, Nikon has figured out how to do phase detect autofocus on a mirrorless camera giving this system excellent AF capabilities.



Coastal Brown Bear, Lake Clark National Park, Alaska (D700, 500mm)



Similar to the lack of new camera announcements for the nature photographer, there have been no F-mount lens announcements from Nikon this fall either. I am sure Nikon is hoping for a MUCH better 2012.

**Olympus:** While Olympus has made a number of good new introductions in the micro 4/3 mirrorless segment in 2011 including two follow-on cameras to its ground breaking EP-1 Pen camera, the big news for Olympus has been all about its accounting improprieties that has caused it's stock to drop by over 80%. For decades, Olympus has been hiding losses illegally from its shareholders. When they hired their first non-Japanese CEO and he realized some accounting problems, specifically with an outrageously large payment to a company acting as an agent to complete a purchase of another business, and brought it to the board, he was fired and then publicly vilified. This opened the proverbial can of worms and it is very rotten. A number of other high level departures have since occurred and the news keeps getting worse. The stock is now so low that the viability of Olympus as a company going forward has to be questioned. While sales numbers are not out yet, the common wisdom is that market share for Olympus will tank as a result of this. It is likely that, even if Olympus survives, this will have a long term effect of slowing development at Olympus.

Meanwhile, Olympus has largely abandoned the big brother to micro 4/3, the original 4/3 system and its line of cameras. There are two capable models and a series of excellent lenses but the cameras do not offer many of the features that the competition does and the lens line-up is relatively incomplete. Putting all of their eggs in the 4/3 basket, has resulted in DSLR's that simply cannot compete with the offerings from Nikon, Canon, and Sony for either noise or dynamic range. I hate to say it but I think 4/3 is a dead end. Micro 4/3 is most definitely not a dead end though but whether or not Olympus remains a viable company remains to be seen.

**Panasonic:** Panasonic is a company on the rise in digital imaging. They, arguably, have the most complete and in many ways the best line of point and shoot compact cameras including what



Western Grebe, Chandler, Arizona (D300, 500mm)

has traditionally been the best in class LX series. The current LX5 is getting a bit long in the tooth though. Panasonic is the leader in the mirrorless interchangeable lens Micro 4/3 category. Micro 4/3 and Panasonic cameras and lenses achieve near DSLR quality in a much smaller and lighter package. Today's micro 4/3 cameras are in the same class, image quality wise as prosumer DSLRs were just a couple of years ago. Panasonic has a complete line of cameras with the entry level GF series without EVF, the G series that is slightly upscale from the GF and has an EVF, the newly announced GX series that is an enthusiast level camera without EVF, and the prosumer level GH series with EVF. These cameras also sport the best video capabilities available short of a very high end video camera. With some publicly available firmware hacks, these relatively inexpensive cameras can outperform some professional video cameras at a small fraction of the cost. Panasonic has also figured out how to get contrast detect autofocus to be nearly as fast as the phase detect autofocus system used in mirrored DSLRs. Additionally, Panasonic offers an extensive line of lenses and the system can use the Olympus and several third part micro 4/3 lenses. Where the system still is lacking is at the very long end of the focal length range. Despite the 2x crop factor, the longest lens available is a 35mm equivalent of 600mm and there are no teleconverters. Panasonic's partnership with Leica insures that some very fine optics are available for this system.



Pacific Golden Plover, Midway Atoll (D700, 500mm)

There is much goodness in the Panasonic micro 4/3 system however there are two significant issues. The first is that Panasonic sensor technology is about a generation behind the leaders. The fact that Nikon can get nearly identical image quality out of a sensor with half the area is telling. If Panasonic can improve their sensor technology they could move into the top tier of camera manufacturers. The second issue is a completely incompetent North American marketing strategy. Critical items are rarely available. This can be cameras, lenses, batteries,



chargers, etc. It is difficult to buy into a system when key parts are rarely or never available. They also seem to not understand that North American Consumers buy black or silver cameras. They do not buy green, blue, red, purple, brown, yellow, or mustard colored cameras except for in the very low end of the point and shoot market. Very few North Americans are going to lay down \$2.5K for a camera and 2 or three lenses that are purple. Understanding your markets is key to being successful in those markets. What sells in Japan is very different from what sells in the USA or Canada.

**Pentax:** With Pentax, you have a bit of a Jekyll and Hyde story. On the one hand, Pentax offers an uninspiring line of APS-C DSLR's with a good but incomplete line of lenses. On the other hand, Pentax offers the most affordable, yet uncompromised image quality, medium format DSLR in the 645D but with a nearly non-existent line of lenses. It is pretty difficult buying into a system that is either marginal on the body side or marginal on the lens side.

Of course the big splash in 2011 is the emergence of the Pentax 645D which uses the same imaging sensor as the Leica S2 but at less than half the price. The images I have seen from the 645D are mind blowing and indistinguishable from the images I have seen from the Leica S2. Both blow away anything in the 35mm arena for detail, color depth and dynamic range. But a camera body does not make a system. Pentax, one year after intro, is still only shipping one lens in any volume with a second wide angle trickling out. If you need more and this you have to go to the used market to try to find older Pentax lenses made for the film era Pentax 645. The prices of these lenses on the used market have tripled in the last 18 months due to lack of availability and the desire of 645D shooters to get more lenses for their 645D.



Grand Canyon National Park, Arizona (D3x, 24-70mm)

For my landscape photography, the Pentax 645D would be the obvious step up from the Nikon D3x but the lack of lenses and the investment required keeps me from even considering it.

**Samsung:** Samsung is quietly developing a formidable interchangeable mirrorless system. Their recent introduction of the NX200, using a 20 megapixel APS-C sensor and a user interface that is clearly designed for the photographer, rather than for the engineer, went mostly unnoticed in North America since Samsung does a fairly poor job of mass marketing their cameras here. Even the lens system is fairly complete although, like other mirrorless systems, the lack of long focal lengths limits its use for the wildlife photographer. The long end only goes to a 35mm equivalent of 300mm.



Bighorn Sheep, Jasper National Park, Alberta (EOS 1D, 400mm)

**Sigma:** Sigma introduced a compelling camera in 2011 with the rebirth of the SD-1 DSLR. Sigma purchased the Foveon sensor technology which departs substantially from the standard Bayer pattern sensor design that is used by almost everyone else. In a Bayer sensor, each pixel is either red, green, or blue sensitive and there are two green pixels for every red and blue pixel pair. During RAW processing, a demosaicing algorithm then creates what it thinks was the correct color from its surrounding neighbors. So with a Bayer sensor you aren't really getting true color information for each pixel site. Foveon technology records the actual color at every pixel site. This allows a Foveon sensor to effectively have a higher resolution at an equivalent pixel count compared to a Bayer sensor. Due to the way a Foveon sensor is made, there are some limitations that a Bayer sensor doesn't have though which can sometimes lead to more noise than an equivalent pixel count Bayer sensor. The SD-1 is Sigma's first high pixel count Foveon sensor camera. It sports a 15 megapixel APS-C sensor which should give equivalent resolution to about a 22 megapixel Bayer sensor. The SD-1 is a fairly full featured



camera but Sigma essentially killed the beast before it even launched it by introducing it at a ridiculous \$10K. That is more than the truly professional Nikon D3x at 24 megapixels or Canon EOS 1Ds Mark III at 21 megapixels. In fact, the camera's feature set is approximately equivalent to a Canon EOS 5D Mark II without video which lists for one third of the SD-1 and has a better line of lenses to go with it. Of course the SD-1 is steeply discounted but not to the level of the 5D Mark II. Sometimes one has to wonder "what the heck were they thinking?"

Sigma also had a big year in lenses by updating several of their highest rated lenses. Most notably, the fantastic 150mm f/2.8 Macro and the highly regarded 120-300mm f/2.8 lens received Optical Stabilization (OS). Sigma also started dabbling in micro 4/3 lenses.

**Sony:** Of all of the camera manufacturers, Sony may have had the biggest year. The Sony NEX interchangeable lens mirrorless is the only mirrorless system that offers true, current generation DSLR level quality. The system uses a Sony designed and manufactured APS-C sensor that are among the most advanced sensors in the world. In the second half of 2011, Sony introduced the second generation of NEX cameras with the enthusiast oriented NEX 5n and the near pro grade NEX 7. This is in addition to the previously introduced entry level NEX 3. The NEX 7 sports a 24 megapixel sensor while the NEX 5 has a 16 megapixel sensor. The lens system is also growing with everything from 24mm to 300mm (in 35mm equivalent) lenses available. As is the case with all mirrorless systems, the long end is very much lacking and in the case of Sony, the ultra-wide end is also lacking. However, with an expensive adapter, any Sony Alpha or older Minolta lens can also be used which dramatically expands the focal length range and adds some impressive Zeiss optics to the equation.



Acadia National Park, Maine (D3x, 24-70mm)

The Sony Alpha line of DSLRs has also been expanded in 2011 with the SLT-A65 enthusiast level camera and the SLT-A77 prosumer grade camera. Both sport the same 24 megapixel APS-C sensor as the NEX 7. Both use Sony's translucent mirror technology. In other words, the mirror does not flip up as it does in traditional DSLRs resulting in a more stable and higher frame per second camera. This does come at the price of about a half a stop of light loss though. The full frame 24 megapixel A900 Professional camera is still available as well. Sony has an outstanding line of lenses including Zeiss optics at some focal lengths. The only thing keeping Sony from making a huge splash in nature photography circles is the lack of a very long lens. If you want anything longer than 300mm you need to try to find an old Minolta 600mm lens and the AF performance won't be up to snuff. Sony does have teleconverters so their 300 f/2.8 could be turned into a 600 f/5.6 with their 2x converter but, as always, 2x converters exact a significant resolution penalty.

Sony has been badly affected by the flooding in Thailand resulting in limited to no availability of the NEX cameras. Production has just recently resumed.

Others: I have not covered companies that don't offer a complete system of cameras, lenses and accessories (except Kodak). Also, companies that only offer point and shoot cameras, only lenses, or only interchangeable back medium format cameras have not been included. These would include Ricoh, Casio and other small point and shoot manufacturers as well as Leaf, Phase, Zeiss, Tamron, Tokina and others.

## **Workshop Announcements**

In just a little over a year I will be leading what promises to be one of the most unique, and



Milford Sound - New Zealand (D3x, 24-70mm)



dare I say EPIC, workshops I have ever led. Through NatureScapes Certified Workshops, I will be offering the New Zealand experience of a lifetime. This incredible 18 day (16 day in New Zealand plus 2 travel days) will feature both the magnificent landscapes of the South Island and the abundant and beautiful bird life of both the North and South Islands and even Stewart Island. In addition to myself as workshop leader, there will be a local guide and roomy vehicle transportation so that you can comfortably take any and all gear and have it next to you ready to shoot. From various species of Albatross to the world's only Alpine Parrot; from the rarest Penguin on Earth to the beautiful Paradise Shelduck; we will go after them all. From the spectacular 12,000 foot high Mount Cook to Milford Sound ( arguably the most beautiful spot on Earth), to the intimate and unique Moeraki Boulders, we will shoot them all and strive to do it in the best light possible. Air travel between Auckland on the North Island and Christchurch on the South Island, ground transportation, boat charters, and hotel accommodations are included. If you would like to learn more and see more pictures from this wonderful part of the world, please click on the following link starting on September 21, 2011:

[http://www.naturescapes.net/workshops/new\\_zealand\\_2012](http://www.naturescapes.net/workshops/new_zealand_2012)

### **Two eBooks Now Available**

Now that winter is here and much of the US is awash in waterfowl it is time to learn about and brush up on techniques to get the best photos of these beautiful birds as possible. Winter is the best time to photograph our many species of ducks and geese as they will be at their prime plumage and in large numbers in almost any body of water that isn't frozen solid. My eBook "Ducks of North America – The Photographer's Guide" is an essential text that covers all of the techniques needed to get the best shots and perhaps many that you haven't thought of. It also covers every species and gives species specific tips on how best to capture them and where to find them. Eleven years in the making, this book is essential for the beginning, intermediate or advanced waterfowl photographer. The tips in it are easily applied to all birds and most other subjects too. It sells for \$30. While this is expensive for an eBook due to the incredible amount of time and money it took to create it, it will easily save you 10 times that in aggravation, time, and failed attempts.



I have also released my previously privately published paper book "West – A Collection of Photographs From The Western United States" in a fully updated and revised eBook version. It is available for \$10.

Both books can be ordered from the fine outlets you will find at this link:

[http://www.ejphoto.com/ebook\\_page.htm](http://www.ejphoto.com/ebook_page.htm)

### **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 nearly 100 galleries accessible through there. Please visit:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/EJ-Peiker-Nature-Photographer/150804446733>

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

### **Private Photography Instruction and Consulting Services**

In addition to the DuckShop photo workshops which I launched 10 years, I also offer private instruction in Wildlife and Landscape photography at the place of your choosing within the USA and Canada. These private workshops are 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](http://www.ejphoto.com/duckshop_private.htm)

I also offer both photo equipment and computer workstation/digital darkroom consulting services. This allows me to combine my 27 years of work in the computer industry with my lifetime of photographic experience and provide services at a technical level that are hard to find elsewhere. Contact me for rates and specifics or visit my rate sheet:

<http://www.ejphoto.com/Quack%20PDF/Rate%20Schedule.pdf>

### **Disclaimers:**

E.J. Peiker conducts consulting services and product design services for a number of photographic product companies. The companies change from time to time.

E.J. Peiker is a consultant for LensCoat and receives compensation from LensCoat.

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

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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.

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Blue-winged Teal - Viera Wetlands, Florida (D300, 500mm, 1.4x)