

QUACK

Newsletter of E.J. Peiker, Nature Photographer and www.EJPhoto.com
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Spring 2008
(Vol 6, Issue 2)

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 (sans photographs) are available online at <http://www.ejphoto.com/newsletter.htm>



Usery Mountain Reserve

Wildflowers Go Crazy In The Southwest (plus this quarter's Photoshop tip)

The last week of February and first two weeks of March are traditionally the peak wildflower times in the southwestern deserts. Unfortunately the last really excellent bloom occurred in the late 1990's. We had a taste in 2005 but overall, this decade has not been as good as hoped due to dramatically lower rainfall amounts than normal. In the last century the deserts around Phoenix have averaged 8 inches of rain per year. In this decade until this year, it has only been a bit over 3 inches per year. This winter, however, we had quite a bit of rain and it was spaced out well through November, December, January, and early February so hopes of a good wildflower bloom were rampant among photographers of the region. Then Mother Nature did her best to give us some warm sunny days in the second half of February and early March to complete the growth cycle and we have had the best wildflower bloom of the decade. I visited Organ pipe Cactus national monument, Picacho Peak State Park, Lost Dutchman State Park, and Usery Mountain Recreation Area in the last few weeks. The first three are world

renowned wildflower spots but to my surprise, the best of all was at the Utery Mountain Park, a county park just north of Mesa Arizona in the Phoenix Metro area.

Wildflower landscape photography can be tricky for several reasons. The first issue is wind and there is no shortage of wind in the southwest in the Spring. In order to get the depth of field required, we often have to use small apertures which result in longer shutter speeds which aren't conducive to even light breezes. Add a polarizer to the equation to saturate colors and the shutter speeds drop even lower. One could increase the ISO but in this type of photography, I personally do not tolerate grain or digital noise and therefore limit my shooting to ISO 200 or lower. So what's a photographer to do besides hoping for a dead calm day, which simply doesn't happen much in the desert? First, it's a good time to use tilt-shift lenses such as the Canon 24mm TS-E and 45mm TS-E. These lenses allow you to tilt the front element thereby tilting the focus plane resulting in much greater depth of field for a given aperture. The downside of this solution is that often 28 to 35mm or 16-20mm is ideal for wildflowers with a mountain backdrop. The 16-20mm range naturally has a lot of depth of field so this is very workable with a regular lens stopped down to f/11 or so. But a shot taken at 35mm, would require f/22 or smaller apertures for adequate DOF if you want a prominent flower foreground with a mountain in the background that is also sharp and then you run into the breeze problem blurring the flowers. I solved this problem by using focus bracketing. I set the camera to f/8 and focus in on the close areas, take a shot, then take another shot focused on the middle ground, and finally take a shot focused on the mountain. Often you can get by with just two shots – one on the foreground and one on the background. I then bring the three shots into Photoshop after identical RAW conversion on all two or three frames. Next I drag them all into the same document as separate layers. I find it easiest if the foreground layer is the top layer and the background layer is the bottom layer. If using good tripod technique, the shots will already be well aligned although some lenses do cause a slight magnification shift as you focus from close to infinity. Photoshop CS3 takes care of this automatically with the Auto Align Layers command. It is then as simple as using a layer mask to block off the appropriate regions in each shot so that the entire photo is sharp. Watch out for the transition zones between the layers to avoid any ghosting caused by flowers that have repositioned themselves due to wind between shots.



Organ Pipe National Monument, Arizona (EOS 1Ds Mark II, 24-70mm)

EJPhoto.com Gets Major Overhaul

After 7 years, EJPhoto.com has undergone a major “under the hood” overhaul. While the interface, look and feel of the site remains familiar, the changes beneath the surface are pretty significant. To the visitor, the major changes that one will notice are that all of the pictures are bigger – more than 50% bigger. The other thing people will likely notice is a dramatic increase in site performance. Here is a summary of all of the changes:

- Photos have gone from 350 pixels along the longest side to 500 pixels wide. While this still maintains decent security from printing high quality reproductions in violation of copyright, it increases the visual impact significantly and also makes the pictures easier to view on the newer higher resolution LCD monitors.
- Upgrading the picture size from 350 to 500 pixels was a massive undertaking that took about 60 man-hours even with utilizing the automation that exists in Photoshop. This is due to the way the picture frames were coded in the original site. Every page was redone so that changing photo size in the future is as simple as overwriting the picture file with a different one. The frame will resize automatically if I ever change the picture size again. The entire process can be handled in a droplet in Photoshop that resizes the pictures and dumps them to the site – nearly zero manual labor – just a couple of hours of automated chugging along by the computer.
- There were a number of places that had some layout consistency issues. These have been corrected.
- A number of general errors were fixed.

- About 200 “vintage photos” have been scanned from slides and negatives and added to the site. These are primarily in the Scenic sections, in particular European countries.
- After I initially started the site in 2001, I adopted a much more consistent file naming and photo cataloguing system. All of the internal filenames are now 100% consistent. While this has no impact on the casual user, it makes working with publishers and print buyers much easier for me.
- I cleaned up many circular references that speed up page draws dramatically.
- Finally, the web site is now hosted by the new high performance servers that run the NatureScapes.net site rather than the doggy old EarthLink servers that were also extremely expensive with massive bandwidth charges and poor performance in the evening hours (US time zones)

Overall this upgrade (EJPhoto.com version 3.0) was needed to grow into the future, to lessen the maintenance burden on me and to give the user a better visual experience while improving performance.



Polar Bear – Churchill, Manitoba (EOS 1D Mark II, 500mm)

Still No Camera Upgrades

Those that follow this newsletter will have read some of my ruminations about new cameras in the past. Many of my clients are astonished that I am still using the EOS 1Ds Mark II and the EOS 1D mark II now that the majority of the issues have been worked out on those cameras. I briefly used a 2008 build EOS 1D Mark III a few weeks ago and its AF performance was quite impressive. But in my brief stint with an EOS 1Ds Mark III it is clear that the viewfinder, sensor and LCD are not in alignment with one another. If the image is square in the viewfinder, it is

off by quite a bit on the final image or on the Live View. This has been the single biggest complaint from 1Ds Mark III owners so far on the online forums. Is it too much to ask of an \$8000 professional camera to have the viewfinder, sensor and LCD all square with one another? There are also still an inordinate number of early life body failures on the 1D mark III. If I couple these ongoing quality issues with the fact that other manufacturers, namely Nikon and Sony are making strides in leaps and bounds to catch up and in many ways surpass Canon, I do not see value in investing in this generation of Canon cameras. When I buy a professional tool, I want to know that it will perform as it should essentially 100% of the time. So I continue to sit on the side lines on this round and will likely not make a decision on my future equipment until after Photokina in Cologne, Germany in September where the manufacturers will tip their hand on what the future holds. Photokina is the world's largest photographic equipment exhibition. In the meantime, my 1D Mark II and 1Ds Mark II continue to perform flawlessly.



Long-billed Curlew – Huntington Beach, California (EOS 1D Mark II, 500mm, 1.4x)

2008 DuckShops Close On A High Note And Then a Low Note

This year's DuckShop Photographic Workshop Season closed on a high note in Orange County where we had three spectacular days with two warm and sunny days of shooting. This was a welcome change to one of the Phoenix workshops which was a gullywasher (it made the wildflowers happy though). Both the Exotic DuckShop and the Wood DuckShop also were great for subjects and company. Once again, the DuckShops sold out and thousands of great duck (and other bird) photos were taken. I sincerely thank all of those that participated and I hope each and every one of the participants got a lot out of the experience.

A few weeks after the final DuckShop of the season in Southern California, I learned that multiple time DuckShop participant and SoCal DuckShop participant Bob Bell of Phoenix, AZ had passed away. I am deeply saddened by this as I had gotten to know Bob and even had future trips planned with him. My condolences go out to Bob's family.

Upcoming Appearances

April 12, 2008 – Rio Salado Habitat Restoration Area – E.J. will be giving an informal talk on nature photography and habitat preservation. See: <http://phoenix.gov/RIOSALADO/>

May 10, 2008 – Boyce Thompson Arboretum – E.J. will be giving his annual Introduction to bird Photography Presentation at 9:00AM in the Lecture Hall. See: <http://www.pr.state.az.us/Parks/parkhtml/boyce.html>

Dec 6-7, 2008 – Bosque del Apache National Wildlife refuge – E.J. will be offering photography related programs. Stay tuned for more information.

DuckShop Hats Still Available

I still have a limited number of DuckShop hats featuring one of my Wood Duck photos embroidered on the front. For more information click here: http://www.ejphoto.com/hat_page.htm

Adobe Camera RAW Calibration Profile Line Continues To Expand

The Adobe RAW Converter is a very powerful tool when used properly. Part of obtaining truly outstanding results is to properly calibrate the color values for each camera you own. ACR has extensive color calibration features built in via the Calibrate Tab; however, it requires special tools, a powerful computer, and a lot of patience to get an accurate profile.

In addition to almost all Canon models, including the 1D mark III, 1Ds Mark III, and EOS 40D, I am now offering the first Nikon calibration profile for the D300. Click here for more details: http://www.ejphoto.com/acr_order_page.htm



Common Zebra Running – Serengeti, Tanzania (EOS 20D, 100-400mm)

EJPhoto Closed Dates

In order to continue to bring you photographs and experiences, I travel to some places that are remote and have no Internet service or at best spotty service. This year, this will happen on the following dates:

June 13-24, 2008

July 2-7, 2008

August 31 – September 12, 2008

Any orders or questions during that time will be handled on a first come first serve basis once I return.

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