# 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
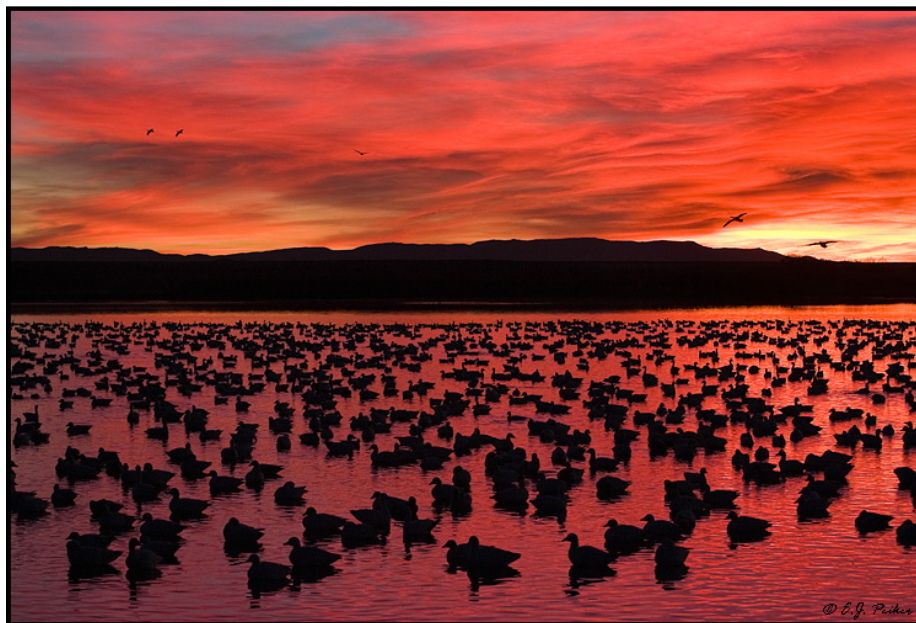
Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, NM (Canon EOS 1Ds Mark II – 70-200mm f/4L IS)

A Return to Bosque

After a four year absence, I finally returned to Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in central new Mexico at the beginning of December. The draw was the first ever NatureScapes.net event. I was asked to be a guest lecturer and to lead two in the field workshops. Overall it was an enjoyable experience and I got to meet many people that I have known only "virtually" for the last several years. My Outdoor Flash photography class went well and the two "In The Field" workshops were fun. The Saturday morning sunrise and pre-dawn color was some of the best I have ever seen in my 20 or so times I have been there since the mid 1980's. Much has changed in that time. The birds are fewer – especially the numbers and variety of songbirds. There hasn't been a Whooping Crane there in about 10 years now as they continue their battle to stave off extinction. There are far fewer Raptors. It is much more crowded and dust is an ever increasing problem. The weather is generally warmer despite going a week later than I have in the past. But it is still one of the premiere bird photography spots on Earth. It is difficult to describe the crescendo of honking that starts in unison around sunrise and then watching 40,000 Snow Gees lift off over your head in a blanket of white and black with a blood red sky as the backdrop. Who can't smile when they see two young mule deer romping in the marsh with their parents keeping a watchful eye. Watching the excitement of a Coyote stalking some prey too low to the ground to see or flushing a group of 100 Sandhill Cranes is always exciting. Ending the day with the graceful fly-in of the Sandhill Cranes to their overnight roosting ponds with a full moon backdrop is always a rewarding experience.

The event went extremely well from Friday evening's kick-off dinner, refuge talk, door prizes and keynote speaker, Rick Sammon through the classes, workshops, and it's ending on Sunday evening.

Snow Goose (Blue Morph) – Bosque del Apache NWR, NM (Canon EOS 1D Mark II – 500mm, 1.4x)

Is My perfect Camera Out There Yet?

A little over a year ago I published my fourth installment on what would be the perfect camera after writing similar pieces in 2003, 2004 and 2005. Of course the desires in a camera change as the technology changes. A summary of my 2007 desires:

1. Full-frame sensor at a minimum of 4 frames per second and a high-speed crop mode (1.3x to 1.6x) at a minimum of 8 frames per second.
2. Approximately 18-20 megapixels in full-frame mode and 10- to 12- megapixels in high-speed crop mode if a Bayer sensor is used
3. The option to turn on image sensor based vibration reduction for lenses that do not have IS/VR.
4. 14-bit per color channel minimum and 16-bit per color optimal.
5. A minimum buffer size of 15 images with a full buffer flush capability in the neighborhood of 3 seconds.
6. An autofocus system that covers the full width and height of the viewfinder and has focus points at the rule of thirds points.
7. Autofocus sensor selection from a single point on the camera such as a joystick.
8. A viewfinder that overlays a histogram in the viewfinder based on the scene being photographed and the exposure choices made.
9. Strong but lightweight body construction (perhaps carbon fiber). I would like to see in the neighborhood of 25% to 33% of the weight being shaved off of the EOS 1D or Nikon D series of professional bodies without sacrificing ruggedness or weather sealing.
10. Two identical media card slots.
11. Full screen histogram on the back LCD panel.
12. Integrated wireless and GPS rather than in add-on modules
13. 1/500 flash sync.
14. Mirror lock up single touch control
15. Live view with AF

Virtually none of this was available when I wrote the article in late August 2007. Times have changed and significant progress has been made on many of the items. The last year has seen several full frame sensor based cameras come to market but they either had too few megapixels to make a crop mode with a high enough pixel count for publishing work or didn't have a fast frame rate crop mode. Fourteen bit color is now the standard although it is debatable whether or not the extra two bits are very useful. With the exception of the Nikon D3 and D700, the extra 2 bits are masked in the noise. Buffers continue to get larger and really have ceased to be a limit in most situations. Autofocus systems have taken a step back in the Canon line and a step forward in the Nikon line. We still don't have full frame coverage of Autofocus sensors although the cropped sensor Nikon D300 comes close. Nikon cameras do have the option for a full screen histogram overlaid over the photo which can be programmed via a custom camera function but we don't yet have histograms in the viewfinder. The pro bodies are still too heavy and use magnesium as their primary structural element. I would still like to see modern composites such as carbon fiber or Kevlar used to maintain the strength while lightening the load. Wireless and GPS is still an add-on module feature rather than an integrated feature. Flash sync speeds have made it to 1/320 and Canon still doesn't feel Mirror Lock-up is important enough to have its own control and AF in live view is now standard.

So we have come a long way. Which camera is the best choice for me in the high megapixel game? There are four contenders, the Sony A900, the EOS 5D Mark II, the EOS 1Ds Mark III and the Nikon D3x. The Sony is nice but a bit noisy and has a very limited lens system (although with some exceptional lenses). It is just not fully up to pro body standards. The Sony is therefore not an option for me. The EOS 5D mark II is basically a three plus year old EOS 5D with a different sensor and live view. The AF was poor at introduction of the original 5D and by today's standards is prehistoric, especially in a $3K camera. Plus, once again Canon has introduced a product with some relatively serious problems that it will have to fix. The 5D is not an option. The EOS 1Ds Mark III has excellent picture quality but the same suspect autofocus system as it's lower megapixel EOS 1D Mark III predecessor. It also does not have a high speed crop mode. Sure you can crop the photos but you simply can't get a fast frame rate if you need it. The new kid on the block is the Nikon D3x. It has a 24 megapixel sensor and a 10 megapixel high speed crop mode – frame rate in high speed crop mode is a respectable 7 FPS and it maintains 5 FPS even at 24 megapixels (all in 12 bit capture mode). Initial indications are that the image quality is outstanding. AF is the same world leading D3 system. The downside is that it is the only camera without self sensor cleaning.

Snow Geese Blast-off – Bosque del Apache NWR, NM (Nikon D300, 200-400mm f/4)

As readers of this newsletter know, in mid 2008 I became a dual system user. In addition to the complete Canon system I have been using for the past 8 years, I added a Nikon D300 and 200-400mm lens and then a D700 and wider stuff for a trip to Namibia as the weight restrictions were just not going to facilitate taking two systems and the 200-400mm was an absolute must have on that trip (and any trip to Africa in my opinion). So I have decided to take the plunge with a D3x and switch completely to Nikon. For the time being I am holding onto my EOS 1D mark IIn body, the 500 f/4L IS and the 300 f/2.8L IS but only until I can procure a Nikon 500mm f/4 VR lens which has quite a lead time.

The D3x, more than any other camera on the market right now, embodies all that I am looking for in a camera body. It is not perfect. It needs a self cleaning sensor, a programmable shutter delay and some of the things on my list that no camera has as of this writing but other than that, it is pretty darn close. Why can Nikon not find it fit to include some decent RAW conversion software with an $8000 camera? On the other hand, like the D700, it has an integrated level which can either be seen on the rear LCD and the camera can be set-up to display it in the viewfinder – no more expensive Hamma Double Bubble's that get lost easily. My EOS 1Ds Mark II served my extremely well and to date has been the best camera I have ever owned but now it is time to take a step to the current state of the technology and I have chosen to return to Nikon after an 8 year absence. The thing I'll miss the most are the various Canon 70-200mm lens offerings which are all world best. Nikon's offerings in this range are simply not up to par for corner image quality. I do believe however that Nikon will remedy this.

Photoshop Tip of the Quarter – Content Aware Scaling

In the Spring 2007 Edition of Quack (http://www.ejphoto.com/quack_2_07.htm) I gave you an excellent way to add canvass to a photograph that might have the subject a bit too large in the frame. Photoshop CS4 brings us a new way to accomplish this task, or any other task that requires adding some space, with a function called Content Aware Scaling (CAS). This is a trick piece of programming that allows you to stretch a photograph and the algorithms differentiate what is detailed subject from what is background and then attempts to only stretch the background thereby leaving the subject alone or affecting it only minimally. The cool thing is that it works to stretch or to shrink things. Try it out. Bring a photo into Photoshop, hit Ctrl-A to select the entire photo and then select Edit > Content Aware Scaling. Now expand or contract the photo – it's magic! Here's an example:

Upland Geese – Original Version

Upland Geese
Ctrl A
Edit
Content Aware Scaling
Drag handle inward from side of photo

Upland Geese
Add Canvas
Ctrl A
Edit
Content Aware Scaling
Drag handle outward from side of photo

It works similarly if you just want to add canvas to a subject that is wholly contained within a photo. In this example, it did not stretch the edges because the subject (or content) stretched to the right and left edge. Now that is smart programming. You can select just parts of a photo as well and then use CAS.

If you prefer doing this the way I showed in my article in Spring 2007, note that the bug in Photoshop that left a thin line at the point of expansion when doing the Free Transform in 16 bit per color mode has finally been resolved by Adobe.

Mule Deer – Bosque del Apache NWR,NM (D300, 200-400mm)

Upcoming Photo Activities and Appearances

In January I will be traveling to the Falkland Islands to photograph Penguins – EJPhoto will be closed from 1/15 to 1/27

On February 27 – March 1 I will be conducting the SoCal DuckShop

March 2 – March 4 I will be at the annual Photo Marketing Association Convention in Las Vegas

On April 4, 2009 I will be giving a presentation on Wildlife Photography at the Rio Salado Habitat in Phoenix, AZ

On May 9, 2009 I will be giving my annual Introduction to Bird Photography talk at the Boyce Thompson Arboretum State Park in Superior, AZ