



The Newsletter of E.J. Peiker - Nature and Travel Photography

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Welcome to the 21st year of the photography newsletter from E.J. Peiker, Nature & Travel Photography and [www.EJPhoto.com](http://www.EJPhoto.com). In this quarterly publication, I share with fellow photographers my photographic experiences, photo equipment reviews, photography tips, processing tips, and industry news. I also inform subscribers about upcoming workshops and products that I offer. All content is copyrighted by E.J. Peiker and may not be reproduced but it is permitted to forward this newsletter in its entirety only. If you would like to be added to the mailing list, unsubscribe, or access back issues, please visit: <http://www.ejphoto.com/newsletter.htm>



Virginia Rail (Sony a1, 200-600mm)

## Bird Photography Evolution

Over the last few years, bird photography had become a smaller and smaller fraction of my photography as a whole. The percentage of my photography that was landscape and travel related went from less than 50% in 2015 to greater than 80% by 2020. I have always done a lot of travel with an emphasis on photography but this came to a screeching halt in early 2020 as the coronavirus pandemic made travel nearly impossible. I did go on a few driving trips for landscapes but they were few and far between. I took virtually no bird photographs between March 2020 and January 2022. Then in January of this year, while on a vacation in the San Diego area I decided to take my Sony a1 and 200-600mm lens to La Jolla one morning and I thoroughly enjoyed myself. It rekindled my love and passion of bird photography and I spent two more mornings photographing birds in the area. Since then I have done several bird shoots in my immediate area and also travelled a bit to photograph birds. I spent three days photographing birds and mountain bike at my friend Ron Niebrugge's Desert Photo Retreat north of Tucson (<https://desert-photo-retreat.com/>). My good friend Alan Murphy invited me down to a new photo spot developed by Dano Grayson, the owner of The Pond at Elephant Head in Amado, Arizona (<https://www.facebook.com/ThePondatElephanthead/>). Then in early June I joined my friends Greg Downing, Alan Murphy, and Lee Anne Russell in British Columbia for several days of intensive bird photography.



Several years ago I published an article on how my photographic style had changed in the first 15 years of my bird photography (<https://www.naturescapes.net/articles/opinions/my-changing-shooting-style/>). In it I describe how and why I changed from a “fill the frame with the bird” style pioneered by Arthur Morris in the 1990’s and early 2000’s to one that puts the bird a bit smaller in the frame and shows a bit of the perch and environment perfected by Alan Murphy in the last 10-15 years. This was done by comparing two photos of the same species taken 10 years apart:



Magnolia Warbler – 2003



Magnolia Warbler – 2013

While photographing in British Columbia it dawned on me that things have really changed a lot just in the last few years since that article was published but not so much in my photographic style, but in equipment and photographic choices I am making and how we get the shot.

The biggest change in bird photography for me has been the switch from a traditional DSLR to an advanced mirrorless camera. The evolution of mirrorless cameras in recent years has made bird photography much more enjoyable due to significantly better and more intelligent autofocus systems. On the DSLR, you are left chasing the bird by moving the AF sensor around to get it on the eye and this is, at best, very inexact and results in many pictures not being perfectly focused on the eye. With modern AF that includes bird eye detection on cameras such as the Sony a1 or the Nikon Z9, the camera finds the eye on its own, regardless of where it is in the frame and sticks with it like glue - even when the



subject is small in the frame and constantly moving. Not only does this increase the number of sharp photos dramatically, it allows the photographer to spend more of his brain's resources and physical resources on composing and tracking the bird in the frame – the result is better composed and timed photos and less need for the spray and pray approach to bird photography where you simply shoot as many frames as humanly possible with the bird placed wherever the AF sensor is hoping to get sharp shots and then cropping for composition later. An additional benefit of the mirrorless camera is that you do not lose AF performance when shooting with the rear LCD as the camera is always operating in “live view” mode so you can set the camera on the ground, tilt the screen up and shoot birds that way to get low eye level shots. You do not have to contort your body into super uncomfortable laying down shooting positions.

Over the years sensor noise and dynamic range have improved dramatically allowing shooting at higher ISO values. This has opened up the possibility of using lenses with a smaller maximum aperture than the large and unwieldy 600mm f/4 lenses. I no longer own one of these lenses and shoot all birds with a Sony 200-600 f/6.3 lens. While I am giving up 1 1/3 stops of light, and the super shallow depth of field that f/4 provides, I am gaining

the versatility of a zoom which allows me to get both the environmental shot and the tighter shot with a quarter turn of the zoom ring rather than needing to change lenses or take the time to add or remove a teleconverter. The 200-600 is very sharp, even wide open and with a 1.4x teleconverter so alternately I can shoot with a 280-840mm f/9 lens. When I look back at my images shot with 500mm f/4 and 600mm f/4 lenses in the past, I often stopped down to f/8 or more to get the bird in focus from bill to tail and when I didn't, as in the Magnolia Warbler shot from 2003, the depth of field was too shallow. I did try the zoom route using the Sigma 150-600mm Sport lens back in my DSLR days and while it was a fine lens (when properly focus calibrated with the Sigma Dock), the AF performance of the DSLR with an f/6.3 lens was poor in low light and completely gave up with a 1.4x teleconverter. It was also very difficult to actually see the subject in the optical viewfinder in low light conditions. There is no loss in AF performance with the 1.4x teleconverter on the Sony a1, although there is some degradation on lesser Sony mirrorless



Columbia with me and it never left my backpack.

cameras with less advanced AF systems and the EVF automatically boosts the viewfinder image. So, the vast majority of the time, I do not miss the big f/4 lenses at all. The Sony 200-600 is more portable, more versatile, and gives up almost nothing on a Sony a1 in AF performance – only in the darkest of scenarios is there a slight degradation compared to an f/4 lens but it is nearly imperceptible. The only time I need an f/4 lens is if I absolutely must use a 2x teleconverter which is almost never with a 50 megapixel camera where I can crop by 50% and still have more pixels than I had with an action oriented DSLR like the D6 or EOS 1Dx series. On those rare occasions, I rent a 600 f/4.

Another way that my bird photography has changed is in the use of flash. Flash was a huge part of bird photography when sensors had little more dynamic range than slide transparency film and ISOs above 400-600 were just too noisy. Today, I almost never use flash since the sensors have become so good that shooting at ISO levels even at 3200 results in photos that have less noise than shooting at ISO 800 ten years ago. Today, the tools to remove noise without destroying subject detail have gotten very good. Tools like Topaz Denoise AI and Topaz Sharpen AI (which also has a noise reduction function) can make high ISO photos look like they were taken at ISO 200-400. I took my flash to British

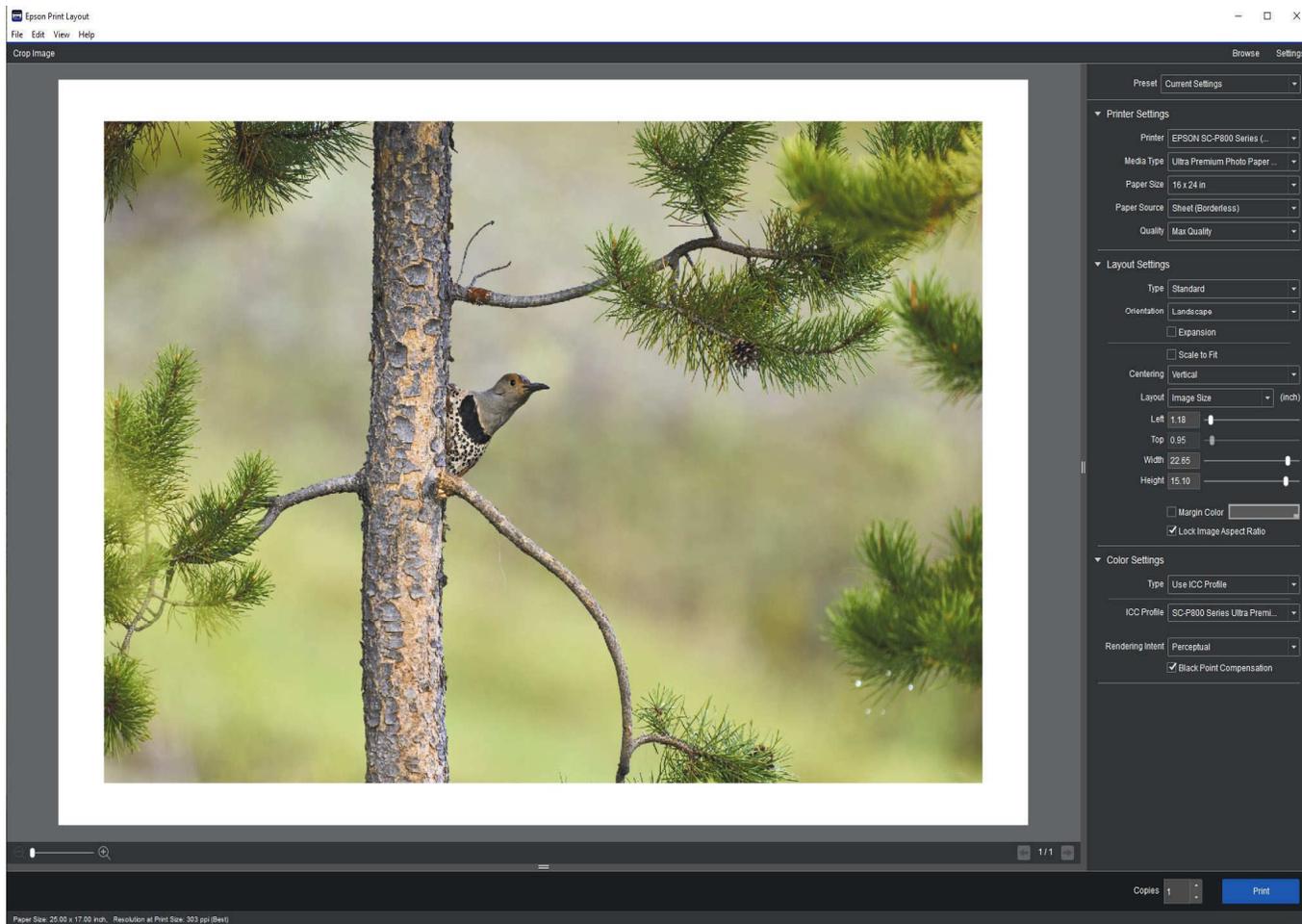
One other area where I have revamped my equipment is the tripod head. While I did this several years ago while still shooting a DSLR, it is a major reduction in the packing footprint and weight as well as a big increase in portability. By switching from a large and heavy gimbal head like the Wimberley II to a ball head with built in side to side flop protection resulting in gimbal like operation but in the size of a full size ballhead, travel and carrying gear has become much easier. I am currently using the Uniqball head but am switching to the FlexShooter Pro head as it also has forward/backward flop protection which the Uniqball or a full gimbal head does not have.

My bird photography style evolved from close-up tight shots to those depicting a bit more of the perch and the environment a decade ago. More recently, the equipment I use to achieve my desired results has gotten dramatically smaller, lighter, more portable, and also much more capable. It will be interesting to see what the next 10 years worth of photographic evolution has in store for my bird photography. I will be in my early 70's by then – that in itself is mind boggling, I'm sure the changes, when viewed through today's "lens" will also be mind boggling.

## Epson Print Layout

If you print with just about any kind of printer out of Photoshop or other photo applications, you have probably become frustrated at times with having to go through a myriad of complex set-up and

configuration screens to get all of the settings right for a print to look exactly the way you think it should. Quite often one little oversight or error in the multitude of selections that need to be made result in wasting an expensive piece of photo paper and even more expensive ink. If you are a user of Epson photo printers, which is by far the highest percentage of photo printer users, then Epson has come to your rescue and puts all of that headache and waste in the past. And best of all it is completely free.



Epson has a free download of software called Epson Print Layout and it is as easy as bringing your photo up in Photoshop and then going to File > Automate > Epson Print Layout. This launches the software and loads the photo. Your photo will appear on the screen in the software already in a soft proof mode – in other words it will be rendered the way the printer will print it based on the paper selection you have made in the panel on the right. The workflow is super easy. The first time you launch it you just tell it which Epson printer you have, select the paper type, and the size of the sheet of paper. You can also modify any layout option such as where to print it on the page, paper orientation, which paper profile you want to use, etc. The settings are sticky so that you do not have to make these selections every time if you are using the same paper. Once you select the paper type, if it is an Epson paper, it automatically selects the correct ICC Profile but if you are using a third party paper, as long as you have an ICC profile for that paper you can manually select the right paper profile. Every paper manufacturer makes ICC profiles available online for their papers for most photo printers on the market. Once you have made your selections, you simply click the print button and the software automatically sets everything on the printer for you and makes a perfect print. It even allows you to specify custom

paper sizes. It truly could not be easier. The link to the download page is here - <https://epson.com/epson-print-layout>

Since I started using this super easy piece of software, I haven't wasted a single sheet of paper or wasted a single drop of ink. Unless you are already using one of the very expensive after market raster image processor software packages, you should be using this free software to make prints if you own an Epson printer!

### The Story Behind the Photo



This photo of a Macaroni Penguin in the South Shetland Islands of Antarctica was used by New Zealand Post for their first day of issue of a postage stamp set commemorating the Antarctica Ross Dependency issued back in 2014. Antarctica is divided into a number of pie slices that are controlled by various governments around the world. The Ross Dependency is New Zealand's slice and includes the Ross Ice Shelf – the largest ice shelf on the planet at about 190,000 square miles although shrinking rapidly. It is a fresh water ice shelf that is as much as 1000 feet deep in parts. The stamp set is issued every few years to bring attention to this pristine and fragile environment.

I took this photo on the very first landing in Antarctica on a photo cruise to this most spectacular part of our planet in 2010. The colony is nearly 100% chinstrap penguins but while photographing a group of Chinies near the shore, I looked up and saw this Macaroni Penguin strolling up the ice field from the water – the only Macaroni Penguin we saw on the entire trip. I immediately re-tasked my camera to photographing this beautiful species. Little did I know that the designers of the stamp set would discover this shot online while putting together their 2014 stamp set!

I received an email one day asking for permission to use this photo and they made a very generous payment offer which I accepted. The funny thing is that when they asked if I wanted to be paid in New Zealand Dollars or US Dollars I of course said US Dollars – they offered the exact same dollar amount in US Dollars that they offered in New Zealand Dollars – a nearly 25% increase in payment to their native currency...



## The Best Lenses for Your Nikon, Canon and Sony Mirrorless Cameras

The table of best lenses for your camera is a living document that gets updated every quarter. Changes from previous tables can be seen in **bold** but there are no changes this time because none of the new lenses that would likely make this list are actually available. As development of DSLR lenses for Nikon and Canon have essentially stopped, I am switching this section to covering mirrorless only. On all systems, areas left blank means that there is no lens currently available or there isn't one that I can recommend with that native mount; however, in virtually all cases, a DSLR lens can be adapted to the mirrorless system often with some minor to moderate compromises, primarily in autofocus capability. For my final DSLR lens recommendations for Canon and Nikon, please see the Autumn 2020 Newsletter linked here:

<https://ejphoto.com/Quack%20PDF/Quack%20Autumn%202020.pdf>

Lens Category	Canon RF Mount	Nikon Z Mount	Sony (E) Mount
Full-frame Fisheye			Sony 28mm f/2 + 16mm Fisheye Conversion Lens
Hyper Wide Prime			Sony 14mm f/2.8 GM Sigma 14mm f/1.8 Art
Ultra Wide Prime		Nikkor Z 20mm f/1.8S	Zeiss Batis 18mm f/2.8 Voigtlander 15mm f/4.5
Extra Wide Prime		Nikkor Z 24mm f/1.8S	Sony 20mm f/1.8 G Zeiss Loxia 21mm f/2.8
Standard Wide Prime			Sony 24mm f/1.4 GM Sigma 24mm f/1.4 Art
Moderate Wide Prime	Canon RF 35mm Macro IS	Nikkor Z 35mm f/1.8S	<b>Sony 35mm f/1.4 GM</b> Sigma 35mm f/1.2 Art Sony-Zeiss 35mm f/1.4
Standard Prime	Canon RF 50mm f/1.2L Canon RF 50mm f/1.8	Nikkor Z 50mm f/1.2S Nikkor Z 50mm f/1.8S	Sony 50mm f/1.2 GM Sony-Zeiss 55mm f/1.8
Portrait Prime (short telephoto)	Canon RF 85mm f/1.2L Canon RF 85mm f/2 Macro IS	Nikkor Z 85mm f/1.8S	Sigma 85mm f/1.4 DG DN Sigma 105mm f/1.4 Art Sony 85mm f/1.4 GM
Medium Telephoto Prime			Sigma 135mm f/1.8 Art Sony 135mm f/1.8 GM Zeiss Batis 135mm f/2.8
200mm Prime			
300mm Prime			
400mm Prime	Canon RF 400mm f/2.8L IS	Nikkor Z 400mm f/2.8 TC VR S	Sony 400mm f/2.8 GM
500mm Prime			
600mm Prime	Canon RF 600mm f/4L IS		Sony 600mm f/4 GM
800mm Prime			
Wide Angle Zoom	Canon RF 15-35mm f/2.8L Canon RF 14-35mm f/4L IS	Nikkor Z 14-24mm f/2.8S Nikkor Z 14-30mm f/4S	Sony 16-35mm f/2.8 GM Sony 12-24mm f/2.8 GM Sigma 14-24 f/2.8 Art Tamron 17-28 f/2.8 Di
Standard Zoom	Canon 28-70mm f/2L Canon 24-80 f/2.8L Canon RF 24-105mm f/4L IS	Nikkor Z 24-70 f/2.8S Nikkor Z 24-70 f/4S	Sigma 24-70 f/2.8 Art Tamron 28-75mm f/2.8 G2 Sony 24-70 f/2.8 GM

Telephoto Zoom	Canon RF 70-200 f/2.8L IS	Nikkor Z 70-200mm f/2.8 VR	<b>Sony 70-200 f/2.8 GM II</b> Tamron 70-180mm f/2.8
Super Telephoto Zoom	Canon RF 100-500mm f/4.5-7.1	<b>Nikon Z 100-400 f/4.5-5.6 VR S</b>	Sony 100-400 f/4.5-5.6 GM Sony 200-600 f/5.6-6.3 G
Macro	Canon RF 100mm f/2.8L Macro IS	Nikkor Z MC 105mm VR S	Sigma 105mm f/2.8 Macro Art Sony 90mm f/2.8 Macro Voigtlander 110mm f/2.5



Ruddy Duck (Sony a1, 200-600mm)

## Gear Garage Sale Continues

Thank you to the great response to my gear sale. I have sold a lot of high quality items in the last quarter including some essentially new stuff. Many filters and camera support items are still. All sales are within the USA to USA addresses only. Prices include ground shipping and I am not charging extra to cover PayPal fees – the price you see is what you pay, no hidden fees. Venmo and Zelle are now also accepted and the preferred method of payment. See the full and up to date listing here:

[https://ejphoto.com/gear\\_for\\_sale\\_page.htm](https://ejphoto.com/gear_for_sale_page.htm)

## Workshops

I currently have no group workshops planned until the COVID-19 pandemic is behind us. Private instruction in camera operation, landscape and wildlife photography is available as well as image

processing training in Capture One, Topaz, Nik, and Photoshop. Photo workstation consulting services are available. These services are currently only available via telephone or video conference. Contact me at [ejpeiker@cox.net](mailto:ejpeiker@cox.net) for more information.

## Facebook and Instagram Pages

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/ejpeiker/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/EJPeikerNaturePhotographer>

## Newsletter Info

This is the 21st year of my quarterly Newsletter. I try to cover the wide array of digital imaging and products from mirrorless to medium format and everything in between. Throughout the years, the information contained herein has always been free and will continue to be free despite the many hours it takes to put it together and significant equipment and travel expenses. Most of the products that I have tested and reviewed, I have purchased myself. A small minority have been made available to me for review and evaluation by loyal readers and a few by the manufacturers themselves. While the newsletter is free either via eMail subscription or via accessing it on my website at <http://www.ejphoto.com/newsletter.htm>, if you find the information useful to you and you do wish to donate for my continuing efforts, you may do so via PayPal and sending the funds to [ejpeiker@cox.net](mailto:ejpeiker@cox.net).

## Disclaimers

E.J. Peiker conducts consulting services and product design services for a number of photographic product companies. Those that know me know that I would not endorse a product, even for compensation, if I did not feel it were a superior product.

E.J. Peiker is a co-founder of [www.Naturescapes.net](http://www.Naturescapes.net) and leads photographic workshops under the **NatureScapes** Certified Workshops banner.

E.J. Peiker is a **Sony** Digital Imaging Pro and receives some services at a reduced cost or free of charge from Sony USA. <https://alphauniverse.com/prosupport/>

E.J. Peiker promotes **LensCoat** products and receives some of their products at no cost. [www.lenscoat.com](http://www.lenscoat.com)

E.J. Peiker is a **Wimberley** Professional Services featured photographer and receives non-monetary compensation from Wimberley. Visit Wimberley at [www.tripodhead.com](http://www.tripodhead.com)

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