



Rewards vs. Awards

Brian Loflin

Reprinted from the March 1998 issue.

One evening you are sitting in the dark, mesmerized by wonderful visual images stimulating your cerebral cortex when suddenly, the colorful silence is shattered by a loud, verbal "SEVEN" at the appearance of a dear friend. Your inner peace is shattered. "But", you scream inwardly, "that's my very best nature photograph." What's wrong with this picture?

You have just experienced first-hand the dramatic effect of the stunning difference between photographic images made for one's personal satisfaction, versus those carefully designed and produced specifically for winning Salon Competition Awards.

Compare salon winners with the "Masters" of nature photography like Art Wolfe, John Shaw, George Lepp and others. Many of their images grace the pages of their books, magazines and advertisements around the world. And they have been paid handsomely, I might add.

Yet, with all these kudos, many of the masters' images would not score well in a Nature Salon. Why? Simply put, the image characteristics and content that editors seek is not in the same genre that judges require for those that win competitions. Editors are concerned about how the image fits a page or layout, sufficient negative space for a message in type, or how it balances with others on the page nearby and a myriad of other concerns. Technical excellence? Absolutely! But, there are other winning factors for the editor.

Winning factors for Nature Salon entries are drastically different. First, the image has to possess significant impact to shout at the judges in a fraction of a second as it is first projected. And it has

to stand out on it's own - competing with, not complementing, like on the printed page - the others visualized in the short time of the evaluation.

Sometimes, we begin to believe that the salon scores are arbitrary, based on the personal likes and dislikes of the judges. While this is infrequently true, most good judges are conscientious about the images' inherent merit. However, that said, we must consider that a Salon, by definition is a contest, ranking every image and its value among others in the competition.

The harsh reality is that *after* the initial impact of the image has passed, judges tend to deal with the power of the image in terms of pre-determined formulas that govern its capacity to win. These formulas include: composition-the position of the subject in the frame, edge mergers, rules of thirds, threes and fives. Formulas also include the quality of the specimen, the lighting, the foreground and background, as well as the photographic quality and imaging technique.

In Nature Salons, the nature story telling value must be of greater importance than the photographic quality in itself. Judges are impressed with the most unusual subject and its presentation or an emotional story. These tend to weigh more than those that are simply "best portraits".

In today's salons many images with excellent stories also possess exceptional quality, all combined into one frame. Competitions therefore become tougher and tougher. This is in part due to the excellent technology available in films, cameras and other tools of the trade. But, it is also greatly due to the excellent acquired skills of the image-maker, learned through the stimulation of individual coaching and today's explosive age of excellent mass media in nature and photography.

The bottom line in this story is that awarding a numerical value to a mostly subjective thing is a mystical blend at best of forcing art into a science. It is often not easy and it is certainly not

taken lightly by the good judges that I know. You will have good experiences and certainly those that don't produce as well as you hope. Not even the best competitors win all the time.

My best advice is to continue to remember the "rules" and strive to produce award winners, if you wish. But, most importantly, do not be discouraged by your efforts. Remember, award-winning competitors worked a long time to figure out the nuances of the game. Most of all, do not give up your quest for that inward, personal satisfaction that nature photography can provide. The next time you are out and are ready to expose that choice subject, look around the frame and ask yourself, "What am I making this image for?" If your answer is "For personal satisfaction," and it does indeed satisfy your inner self, then the reward is complete. Be sure to enjoy your photography for its own rewards. Don't be framed-in by formulas.

Editor's note: Brian and his wife Shirley now live in Austin, Texas and read the electronic version of the newsletter. They made substantial contributions to the club during the few years they were in Minnesota. There was a Loflin led spring trip to the Ely area. One night Brian led the group outside to demonstrate how to call owls. It was the wolves that replied. It was a great trip with lots of fun, photography and food. We ought to do it again.

The election of club officers will take place at the May 15 meeting. President Joe Kandiko and Treasurer Jim Duncan have agreed to serve again. Candidates for vice president, secretary and editor are needed. Please contact Joe or any of the incumbents to volunteer or obtain information.

The Bog

Ron Winch

It was like walking on a trampoline; with each step the "ground" yielded a foot or more. Cautiously I chose each footfall to land on the root system of some ericaceous shrub. Still I sank deep into the sphagnum moss. Acidic water soaked my jeans to the knees. I was wading wet for there was absolutely no guarantee of staying dry; maybe even plunging through the sphagnum mat into the cold brown acidic water below.

What sort of an environment was I in? Some exotic location hours from anywhere? Yes and No!

I was picking my way through a northern quaking bog hoping to learn more about the flora that inhabit this extremely harsh environment. Some peat bogs in northwestern Minnesota may be more than fifty miles long, and for all practical purposes impenetrable. A sense of caution led me back to this small; bog, half the size of a football field, where I had previously photographed a seventh grade environmental class exploring the ecology of a northern bog.

Today, reaching close to its northern zenith, the sun beats down from an azure blue sky. The heat, combined with the extreme effort of trudging through almost knee-deep sphagnum moss, invited rivulets of perspiration to cascade down my clammy skin. My wet feet were almost freezing, as this thick mat of moss is an excellent insulator. Even in mid-June, ice can be found below the mat where it is not floating. Since there is no inflow or outflow of water (only rain and snow replenish the moisture) the bog is very acidic, having a pH as low as 4.2. The bog is an unforgiving habitat for most plants. Its harsh terms of existence protect its well-adapted flora from invasion by other species. While low in plant diversity, the acidic bog is a unique and irreplaceable botanical garden.

Three of Minnesota's carnivorous plants are common residents here as well as our only "deciduous conifer", the tamarack tree. Tallest and most conspicuous of the carnivores is the pitcher plant. It sports a unique burgundy flower nearly two feet above the ground. The leaves are elongated pitchers or vase-like, green and burgundy in color - less sun, more burgundy - and usually half

full of water. Inside the pitcher, tiny hairs angle downward. An investigating insect makes it way down to the water, finds it can't retreat, falls into the water and is eventually digested, releasing much needed nitrogen to the plant.

Sundew, only three or four inches high, uses the several hundred liquid-tipped spines of its leaves to trap and digest its prey. The hairs seem able to distinguish between edible and inedible items. Once an insect lands on the odorous spiny leaf, it is usually trapped. Adjacent spines bend toward the point of contact and enclose the prey in a temporary stomach and digestion takes place.

Horned bladderwort is the least noticeable of the three. Small snapdragon-like flowers indicate its presence, but all action takes place below the surface.

The "deciduous conifer" is the smoky gold tamarack of autumn, which along with black spruce are able to withstand the nutrient poor environment of the bog.

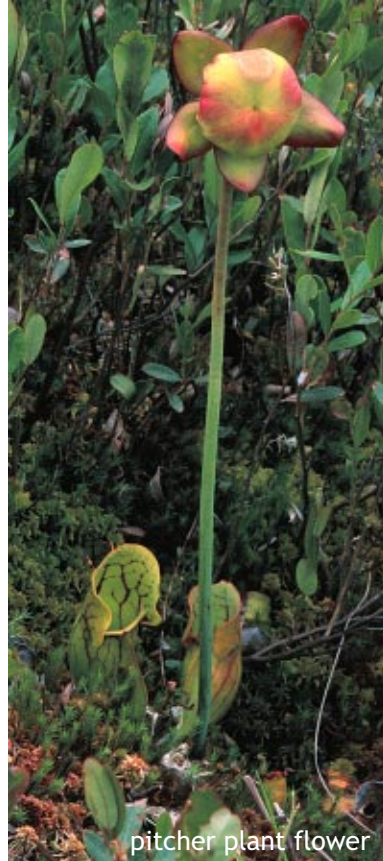
You'll also find such plants as bog rosemary, bog bean, leatherleaf, blueberry and several sedges. Birds flit in and out over the bog in search of insects that are able to live there.

Deer may browse the edges, and maybe you'll happen upon a mink frog.

Since few species are able to survive in this harsh environment, bogs are considered to be quite sterile. However, to a keen observer with a good eye and a macro lens, they will yield spectacular photos of plants that eat animals. And NO, you don't have to drive 200 miles to find a bog. The metro area has several of the southernmost bogs in Minnesota. Try Boot Lake SNA just west of Carlos

Avery WMA, or the quaking bog at Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden and Bird Sanctuary. This is definitely "wet belly" photography and may not be for everyone. Maybe I'll see you there.

As the club year winds down to the last meeting, I'd like to express a few thoughts. Thanks to Dave Klein for the sometimes unappreciated task of arranging programs and judges. Unfortunately my plate was too full to attend all the meetings, but the slide program done by Dale Bohlke was one of the most sensitive and exquisite that I've seen in some time. I will miss having breakfast with Ron Cleveland as I rush to get my article to him at the last minute. He has done a great job as editor and will be missed. I have had the privilege of working with



pitcher plant flower



rose pogonia



mink frog

him for four years, as this is my thirty-sixth article.

For my part, I tend not to tell you precisely where to go; where to plant your tripod and which way to point the camera. Rather, through slide programs and articles I try to excite your senses and inspire you to seek out new venues and to become one with nature which ultimately leads to being a more sensitive photographer and a better communicator - which, I assume we are all striving for. I hope to continue sharing these inner moments.

May you all have a wonderful summer and the Great Spirit willing, we shall all meet again in September.

Exposure 2

John Pennoyer

Not all things are created equal when it comes to reading exposure from your camera's metering system. Most new cameras have three exposure metering systems-spot, center weighted, and evaluative which is sometimes referred to as a matrix system. In order for photographers to capture proper exposure on film, they must understand the difference between the various metering systems. So let's review these differences.

Center-weighted:

Most of the metering is done on about a 12mm circle in the center of the viewfinder. Usually 60%-75% of the metering is done in this spot, with 25% to 40% done outside of this center spot. So it is important for a photographer to understand that if using the Center-weighted metering system the outside will have an influence on the subject. One of the problems with this metering system is that photographers may have a tendency to center their subjects.

Evaluative/Matrix: Every camera manufacturer has a little variation on this type of system, but it amounts to using multiple sensors that will calculate exposure in that segment. These multiple readings will go to the camera's central processor and then calculate what the proper exposure should be. This is the metering system that I use for probably 80% of my photography. It certainly is not perfect, but I personally feel it is better than center-weighted. However I still need to compensate with my EV for white or dark subjects.

Spot: This is the only metering system in which 100% of the metering is done in a very small area. Most spot meters cover about 2% of the frame. Anything outside of this area has no influence on the metering system. Many photographers will use this metering system when confronted with a difficult metering situation. I will use this metering feature about 20% of the time.

Each camera manufacturer will have variations on these metering systems so be sure and read your particular owner's manual to understand exactly how these

metering systems work with your camera. But also remember no matter what metering system you are using, the processor in the camera wants the 18% neutral tone. (Nikon F5 RGB metering system is totally different, and is not part of this discussion).

As you already know, the two metering systems that I use are Evaluative/Matrix and Spot. Except for spot metering, a photographer must understand



that whatever you see in the viewfinder will have an affect on your subject. I learned this a long time ago from Al Schulz, when we were photographing Brown Bears at Brooks Falls in Alaska. I was shooting a Nikon FE2 with center weighted metering. I had shot about 5-6 rolls of film at EV 0.

Of course these very dark brown bears were at the falls, surrounded by white water. Al mentioned to me that the white water would make the bears very dark if I did not open up to compensate for this. When I got my film back the first few rolls showed that the influence of the white water made my brown bears almost "black". In the rest of the rolls where I compensated about +1/2 stop the brown bears were the correct tone. That was a lesson that I never forgot, and it has really helped me want to understand this exposure thing.

The photo that accompanies this article is a Wild Turkey that I photographed in April this year. I was in my blind and managed to call in two mature Toms. My camera was set to Aperture priority with matrix metering. My exposure value (EV) was set to +1/3. If you look closely at the photo the turkey is a little darker than middle tone, but the background is

much lighter than middle tone. Compensating +1/3 allowed perfect exposure on the turkey. However, if I would have used spot metering and put the spot directly on the dark breast of the bird my EV would have to be -1/3. This would have allowed perfect exposure on this magnificent bird.

If you remember the photo from last month (a Trumpeter Swan coming in for a landing on the Ole Mississippi) I was on

Aperture priority with matrix metering with my EV set to -2/3. The reason this was necessary was that the dark blue water has an overexposure influence on this very white bird. Setting my EV to -2/3 allowed perfect exposure on the bird even though the water is darker than normal. Sometimes a photographer must determine what the most important element in a photograph is and expose accordingly.

Of course the best way to really understand exposure is not by reading this article or any other article, but to go outside and shoot lots of film, while at the same time record your reading on a notepad and determine what exposure system works best for you.

Everyone have a great summer and make Kodak and Fuji happy by shooting lots of film!

Good Shooting

Personal Note: I would like to take this space and thank our Editor, Ron Cleveland. Not only has he been our editor for the last 7 years and made this newsletter one of the best camera club newsletters in the nation, but he has over the years been the biggest supporter for this Nature Camera Club. He has organized many field trips, workshops, etc. Much of the success of this club over the last few years has been due to his dedication. Ron, I want to personally thank you for your friendship and the many extra things that you have done for this camera club. This is a rest well deserved, now take that Canon equipment and shoot lots and lots of film!

John

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Meeting on the third Wednesdays, Sept-May
at the Visitor Center of the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge, 3815 East 80th Street, Bloomington, MN

FIRST CLASS MAIL



May 15 Program:
**Techniques and Images
in Bird Photography
by Dave Klein**

Sell Out

I'm selling almost all my photo equipment, too feeble to take pictures. Any reasonable offer accepted.

Nikon F3 High Point
Nikon SB24 flash
2 Nikon SB17 flash
Minolta flash meter III F
~~Luna Pro light meter~~ SOLD
Nikon 28-85 lens
Nikon auto 70-210 lens
Bogen 3001 tripod
Rear projection screen
Photo Vest
Photo Screen
~~Rue blind and folding stool~~ SOLD
Slide viewer
Nikon P54 slide copier
Many small items
Lawrence Quinn
6108 Kellogg Avenue
Edina MN 55424-1801
952-929-4030

April Awards

Judges: Alan Schulz & Jim Duncan

10

Kathy Hobbs - Trumpeter Swan Gathering
Kathy Hobbs - Long-Eared Owl in Pines
Vijay Karai - Big Tusker Kilimanjaro
John D. La Mere - Crex Meadows Sunrise

9

Mariann Cyr - Fulmar Pair, Latrabjarg
Marilyn Gladitsch - Wild Mushroom Caps
Vern Nelson - Female Hairy Woodpecker

8

Mariann Cyr - Waterfall, Talknafjordur
Dave Ellenbecker - Prairie Smoke #7
Marilyn Gladitsch - Ice Droplet
Morrie Holm - House Sparrow
John D. Jenkins - Black Crowned Night Heron

John D. Jenkins - Young Cattle Egrets
Cathy Jones - Lake Morton Goose
Cathy Jones - Mute Swan
Joe Kandiko - Sunset Pelican
Vijay Karai - Sand and Weeds
John D. La Mere - Mallard Pair
Jean McDonough - Elk in Snow #2
Vern Nelson - Male Great Spangled Fritillary
Tom Samuelson - Drake Mallard #3
Florence Scholljegerdes - Black Bear No. 2

Tell a Story

Dale Bohlke

Summer vacation and Kodak go together like fish and water, birds and trees; I am sure there are many more analogies. Summer vacation is also family time. How can you make the most of your passion and still take a family vacation? Plan ahead and negotiate. Let everyone know well in advance that "at this hour and location I want to spend one hour taking pictures." Sunrise is another great time for photography, not only good shots but also minimal family disturbance. You can be back when the light is flat and the family is just finishing breakfast. Just remember on this summer's vacation your tripod is worth its weight in gold, but your family time is priceless!

John's Wildlife Photo Workshop

John Pennoyer will conduct a second session at the Vince Schutte Wildlife Sanctuary on August 24-26. Call 763-416-4134 or E-mail impnature@aol.com